

Vitalisation of Multicultural Education through the Integration of the Epistemology of the Meaning of Ta'aruf Q.S. al-Hujurat: 13

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Abstract

This study aims to vitalise epistemology by exploring alternative philosophical foundations from QS. Al-Hujurat: 13 and operationalising them through synthesis with critical and multicultural education theories. This study employs a qualitative research Design with a library research approach to examine the epistemology of ta'aruf as articulated in QS Al-Hujurat 13 and its relevance to the revitalisation of multicultural education. Data collection is conducted through documentation techniques by systematically identifying, classifying, and reviewing relevant texts and written sources. The data analysis employs a hermeneutic method to interpret the Qur'anic text contextually and dialogically, combined with qualitative content analysis to examine conceptual patterns and theoretical intersections between Islamic epistemology and multicultural education theories. The results reveal that the concept of "i ta'arufu" (getting to know each other) in the verse encompasses Ta'aruf Epistemology, a relational, dialogical, and socially transformative knowledge paradigm. Vitalisation is achieved by synthesising and integrating Freire's concept of dialogue-praxis with Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education, resulting in a transformation model at the levels of curriculum (oriented towards experience), pedagogy (teacher as learner and facilitator), and evaluation (authentic assessment).

Keywords

Epistemology of Ta'aruf, Multicultural Education, Vitalization, QS. Al-Hujurat: 13, Paulo Freire, James A. Banks.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a unique nation. (Fārūqī et al., 1986) states that this uniqueness lies in its diversity, where various ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures coexist. However, this diversity is not without challenges; in daily life, social friction still frequently occurs. Prejudice, misunderstanding, and even conflict between groups often arise. This indicates that the existing diversity has been adequately embraced. Given the challenges of a diverse world, the world of education is a crucial arena for diversity. (Jayadi et al., 2022). As instruments in the world of education, schools and universities should be learning how to live together. (Fā identifies) identifies that multicultural education in Indonesia has long existed (R' Boul, 2). Values such as cooperation are found in various subjects. However, there is a fundamental problem with the approach by Sed (Abdullah et al., 2024). Often, multicultural education appears to be merely an addition or decoration to the curriculum (Gay, 2015). Material on diversity is taught superficially, simply to fill a list of themes (Smith, 2008). The approach is often ceremonial, such as celebrating certain religious holidays, without a genuine understanding of its meaning. (Yanti et al., 2024)

As a result, multicultural education fails to foster a sense of inclusive belonging. According to Kevin (Banks & Banks, 2004), students know that Indonesia may not necessarily understand how to respect and engage positively with differences (Wardiyah Wardiyah et al., 2023). This is a problem at the paradigm level of epistemology, which is how we know and understand reality (Wahfiuddin Al Musyarrofi & Mohammad Rofiq, 2025). Our current epistemology in multicultural education is weak. It lacks strong philosophical roots, making it easily swayed by narrow and exclusive currents of thought. (Sibawaihi et al., 2025a) Thus, religious rules, especially Islam as the majority religion in Indonesia, can make a significant contribution (Kasmiati & Arbi, 2024). The Qur'an, as the source of Islamic teachings, contains not only rules of worship but also in-depth insights into human life, including diversity. (Gaffar & Anees, 2025) mentions one very relevant verse, QS. Al-Hujurat verse 13. This verse explicitly states that God created humans into nations and tribes so that they may know one another (li ta'arafu), a very progressive, fundamental principle. (Mariyono, 2024)

The concept of "getting to know each other" (Ta'aruf) in this verse is not merely an order to simply get to know each other (Suardi et al., 2025). According to (Muhajir et al., 2025), ta'aruf is a profound imperative that guides destiny (sunnatullah) and simultaneously establishes it as a path to achieving a harmonious social life. Unfortunately, the philosophical potential of this

verse has not been fully explored to strengthen the foundation of multicultural education in Indonesia. Viewviisylkelisclikelquestionedin many forums and scientific works, it is an analysed thought (epistemology). (Anwar, 2021)

Many previous studies have examined Surah Al-Hujurāt: 13 from a classical interpretation or its application in a general social context. However, few have specifically used this verse to dismantle and reconstruct the epistemology of Indonesian multicultural education. Yet, this approach is desperately needed. We need a strategy that can bridge the profound meaning of the sacred text with the complex realities of today. That approach is hermeneutics. Several studies have addressed multicultural education, both conceptual and applied. For example, research by Haris (2023) indicates that multicultural education remains additive rather than systematically integrated. Values are taught cognitively, with little emphasis on shaping attitudes and actions. This demonstrates superficial signs of a weak foundation for multicultural education, but fails to address the underlying reasons for this (epistemology).

Research by BaBanksemphasises a comprehensive educational framework that promotes social justice, equality, and respect for cultural diversity within academic institutions. Through the five dimensions of multicultural education content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture, Banks highlights the importance of intercultural dialogue and critical awareness in learning processes. These principles resonate strongly with the epistemology of *ta'āruf* articulated in Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13, which affirms human equality and acknowledges diversity as a fundamental basis for social interaction. The concept of *ta'āruf* provides a normative and ethical foundation that reinforces multicultural education by framing diversity as a constructive reality that must be engaged through mutual recognition, dialogue, and respect. In this integration of *ta'āruf*, this integration is grounded in both ethical and theological perspectives (Banks, 2015).

Another relevant study is derived from Freire's theory of critical pedagogy, which positions education as a dialogical and emancipatory practice that fosters vital consciousness (*conscientização*) and challenges oppressive consciousness (Freire, 2018). Freire criticises banking models of schooling that reduce learners to passive recipients and instead advocates participatory learning rooted in learners' social and cultural experiences. This pedagogical orientation aligns with the epistemology of *ta'āruf*, which promotes egalitarian relationships, mutual understanding, and active engagement among diverse social groups. By integrating *ta'āruf* epistemology into multicultural education,

Freire's critical pedagogy is further strengthened through the incorporation of Islamic moral and spiritual values, thereby supporting the development of inclusive, dialogical, and socially just educational practices within pluralistic societies (Freire, 2018).

Further research (Reza, 2022: 80-90) shows that the concept of *Ta'aruf* is a divine command to build harmonious *Ta'aruf* relationships. This research successfully maps the views of classical commentator Ibn Kathir and provides a strong textual foundation. However, it stops at a normative interpretation and does not appear to relate it sufficiently to specific practical contexts, let alone educational epistemology. Furthermore, Junaidi (2015: 293-320) shows that the epistemology of traditional Islamic education tends to be *bayani* (textual) and less involved in *burhani* (rational) and *irfani* (spiritual-intuitive) approaches to dealing with pluralistic realities. This research touches on the epistemological level, but its context is Islamic boarding schools and does not specifically focus on multicultural education.

An explicit review of previous research indicates that studies on multicultural education and QS. Al-Hujurāt: 13 are still proceeding along two parallel paths. On the one hand, studies of multicultural education tend to be technical and secular, lacking a clear paradigmatic grounding. On the other hand, studies of verse interpretation tend to be normative and have not yet engaged in critical dialogue with the discipline of educational philosophy. This research gap lies in the absence of studies that combine critical-epistemological analysis of multicultural education, in-depth hermeneutical reading of sacred texts, and reconstruction of vitalisation.

METHODE

This study employs a qualitative research Design using a library research approach. Qualitative research is selected because the focus of this study is not numerical measurement but in-depth interpretation, conceptual exploration, and meaning construction derived from texts and theoretical frameworks. The library research approach is particularly appropriate, as the study's object consists of written sources, including Qur'anic texts, classical and contemporary interpretations (*tafsir*), and educational theories related to multicultural education.

Library research enables the researcher to systematically examine authoritative texts and scholarly works to analyse the epistemology of *ta'aruf* as articulated in Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13 and its relevance to the revitalisation of multicultural education. Through this approach, the study engages in a dialogical analysis between Islamic epistemological values and contemporary theories of

multicultural education, particularly those proposed by Paulo Freire and James A. Banks.

Data in qualitative research refer to all forms of information that are relevant to the research objectives (Tanzeh, 2011). In this study, data consist of textual, conceptual, and theoretical materials related to the epistemology of *ta'āruf*, Qur'anic interpretation, and multicultural education. Primary data sources are the main references directly analysed in this study. These sources provide foundational concepts and theoretical frameworks essential to the research focus. The primary data include: 1) The Qur'anic verse Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13 as the core textual source; 2) Classical and contemporary *tafsir* works that interpret Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13; 3) Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy; 4) James A. Banks' theory on the dimensions of multicultural education. Secondary data sources serve as supporting materials that strengthen analysis and contextual understanding. These include scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and academic publications discussing multicultural education, Islamic educational thought, pluralism, and diversity, particularly within the Indonesian educational context. (Amin & Kaunain, 2023)

Data collection in this study is conducted through documentation techniques. Documentation is used to collect, record, and organise written materials relevant to the research topic. The researcher systematically identifies, selects, and reviews texts that discuss the epistemology of *ta'āruf*, Qur'anic interpretation, and multicultural education theories (Lynch, 1986). The documentation process involves several steps: collecting relevant sources, classifying texts by research themes, and organising data to meet analytical needs. Using this technique, all data obtained are textual and directly related to the objective of revitalising multicultural education through the integration of *ta'āruf* epistemology.

Data analysis in this study employs a hermeneutic analysis technique combined with qualitative content analysis. Hermeneutic analysis is used to interpret Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13 by examining its linguistic structure, contextual meaning, and interpretative perspectives found in classical and contemporary *tafsir*. This approach allows the researcher to uncover the epistemological values embedded in the concept of *ta'āruf* (Sundari et al., 2024). Qualitative content analysis is applied to analyse the analytical texts of Paulo Freire and James A. Banks. This technique involves identifying key concepts, categorising terms, and examining conceptual relationships between Islamic epistemology and the principles of multicultural education. Through these analytical procedures, the study formulates a coherent synthesis that demonstrates how *ta'āruf* epistemology can be integrated into multicultural education to promote inclusivity, dialogue, and

social justice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Epistemological Meaning of *Ta'āruf* in Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13

This study explores the epistemological meaning of *ta'āruf* as articulated in Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13, positioning the concept not merely as a social ethic but as a foundational mode of knowledge production in the Qur'anic worldview. By examining **ta'āruf** within its textual, theological, and socio-anthropological dimensions, the findings reveal how knowing the Other is framed as an intentional, ethical, and dialogical process grounded in divine purpose. The verse suggests that human diversity functions as an epistemic horizon through which understanding, moral awareness, and mutual recognition are cultivated, thereby challenging reductionist or hierarchical conceptions of knowledge and offering an alternative Islamic epistemology rooted in relationality, responsibility, and *taqwā*.

Table 1. Core Findings on the Epistemology of *Ta'āruf* in Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13

Aspect Identified	Empirical Finding
Ontological basis	Humanity originates from a single source (male and female)
Social reality	Human diversity exists in the form of nations and tribes
Key concept	<i>Ta'āruf</i> as mutual knowing
Relational pattern	Interaction and reciprocity
Ethical orientation	Piety (<i>taqwā</i>) as the sole criterion of merit
Knowledge process	Understanding emerges through encounter and interaction
Educational implication	Diversity functions as a medium of learning

The hermeneutical Reading of Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13 reveals several core findings related to the epistemological meaning of *ta'āruf*. The verse explicitly affirms that all humans originate from the same source, thereby rejecting any inherent superiority based on ethnicity, tribe, or social status. Diversity in the form of nations and tribes is presented as an intentional condition of human existence rather than a deviation or social problem. The keyword *li tta'ārufū* indicates that diversity serves an epistemic function. Human difference is not merely to be observed but to be engaged through mutual knowing. The term *ta'āruf* linguistically implies reciprocity, suggesting that knowledge about others is produced through interaction rather than unilateral observation. This establishes relational engagement as a foundational mode of knowing. (Graue, 1999)

The verse further positions piety (*taqwā*) as the sole criterion of human worth, thereby situating ethical consciousness as the orientation of knowledge. Knowing the other is therefore not value-neutral but ethically directed. These findings indicate that Q.S. Al-Hujurāt: 13 implicitly formulates a knowledge framework in which interaction, reciprocity, and ethical orientation function as epistemological principles. (Putri et al., 2023)

Ta'āruf as an Epistemological Process

Table 2. Characteristics of *Ta'āruf* as an Epistemological Process

Dimension	Identified Characteristics
Source of knowledge	Social interaction and encounter
Mode of knowing	Dialogical and reciprocal
Nature of knowledge	Intersubjective understanding
Orientation	Cooperation and mutual benefit
Educational relevance	Learning through lived diversity

The findings indicate that *ta'āruf* functions not merely as a moral instruction but as an epistemological process. Knowledge is generated through direct engagement with others who are different in background, culture, and experience. This process involves dialogue, reflection, and openness, allowing understanding to emerge gradually through interaction.

Unlike instrumental models of knowledge transmission, *ta'āruf* emphasises knowing. Understanding is not produced through memorisation (memorisation, categorisation, in-depth, opportunity, increase. These findings) position *ta'āruf* as an epistemological mechanism capable of shaping educational practices that treat diversity as a learning resource rather than an object of instruction.

Discussion

Integrating the Epistemology of *Ta'āruf* into Multicultural Education

The findings demonstrate that *ta'āruf* constitutes a dialogical and relational epistemology rooted in ethical orientation. This epistemological structure aligns closely with Paulo Freire's critique of the banking model of education, which reduces learners to passive recipients of knowledge. Freire emphasises the reciprocal nature of *ta'āruf*, subject-process stance, by positioning learning as a mutual process grounded in lived experience. Freire's concept of praxis—reflection and action—resonates with the teleological orientation of *ta'āruf*, which leads to cooperation and competition in goodness (*fastabiqul khairāt*). While Freire situates praxis within emancipatory social action, *ta'āruf* extends this praxis through an ethical-spiritual orientation that directs learning toward moral responsibility and collective transformation. This convergence strengthens the theoretical

foundation for dialogical multicultural education.

The findings also align with James A. Banks' framework of multicultural education, particularly his emphasis on moving beyond superficial content integration toward transformative and social action approaches (Banks, 2016). The epistemology of *ta'āruf* supports Banks' knowledge construction process by encouraging learners to critically examine how perspectives are shaped through interaction with diverse others. Rather than treating diversity as static content, *ta'āruf* frames diversity as an ongoing process of relational learning. Previous empirical studies on multicultural education indicate that programs limited to additive approaches fail to reduce prejudice or promote social justice (Maulana, 2024). The epistemological orientation of *ta'āruf* offers an antithesis to such limitations by embedding dialogue, reciprocity, and ethical commitment into the learning process itself. This positions *ta'āruf* not as a complementary value, but as a foundational epistemology capable of revitalizing educational education.

Furthermore, the findings affirm Banks' revitalising education must culminate in action. The orientation that n of *tarevitalising* cooperation culminates in a moral and epistemological basis for this action-oriented approach. Students are not only encouraged to understand diversity but to engage collaboratively in addressing injustice arising from prejudice and exclusion (Asysyifa & Mustofa, 2025). In dialogue with contemporary studies on culturally responsive pedagogy (Masnida et al., 2025), *ta'āruf* strengthens multicultural education by grounding responsiveness in ethical encounter. This integration affirms that revitalised education is not merely curricular reform but a paradigmatic shift in knowledge. (Different & Rani Wdiffering in the shift5)

The epistemology of *ta'āruf* also intersects with contemporary discourse on intersubjective knowledge in education, which emphasises that standing is socially constructed through encounters with others (Habermas, 1984). In this context, it emphasises that the individual emerges from communicative action. The findings of this study reinforce this view by demonstrating that *ta'āruf* positions dialogue as the primary pathway to understanding difference. This reinforces multicultural education as a communicative rather than transmissive pedagogical project (Raihani et al., 2025). Several empirical studies in multicultural education indicate that dialogical interaction significantly reduces prejudice when learners engage in sustained, structured encounters across cultural boundaries (S et al., 2020). The epistemology of *ta'āruf* strengthens these findings by providing a normative and ethical grounding for such encounters. Unlike neutral contact theories,

ta'āruf embeds interaction within moral accountability and mutual responsibility. This ethical dimension addresses critiques that contact alone is insufficient to dismantle deeply rooted structural prejudice. (Lestari et al., 2023)

From a curriculum perspective, the integration of ta'āruf epistemology challenges the dominance of standardized standardised educational models. Research on curriculum reform highlights that experiential, problem-based, standardised learning is more relevant to the curriculum and competence (Dtoawati Jufri & St. Wardah Hanafie Das, 2024). The findings of this study affirm that ta'āruf epistemology naturally supports experiential learning by positioning diversity as a lived educational resource. This confirms that multicultural education rooted in ta'āruf necessitates curricular flexibility and contextual responsiveness. (Nabilah, 2024)

Teacher identity and agency also emerge as critical dimensions in the discussion of ta'āruf-based multicultural education. Studies on culturally responsive teaching emphasise that teachers must recognise positionality and biases to facilitate genuine dialogue (Mughtar & Inayah, 2025). The epistemology should recognise their positionality as an ethical obligation rather than a pedagogical strategy. Teachers are therefore positioned not merely as facilitators but as moral participants in the learning community. (Nurlita et al., 2024). Assessment practices in multicultural education have long been criticised for focusing on outcomes while neglecting affective and social dimensions (Farantika et al., 2022). The epistemology criticised, focusing on attitudes, relationships, and social engagement as legitimate learning outcomes. They emphasise learning outcomes, emphasising the importance of assessment models that capture empathy, dialogue, and collaborative action. Such alignment further strengthens the relevance of ta'āruf within modern educational evaluation discourse. (Hidayah et al., 2025)

In the context of Indonesian education, the epistemology of ta'āruf aligns with national principles that emphasise diversity. Several studies on multicultural education in Indonesia indicate that normative values often remain symbolic and are insufficiently translated into classroom practices (Kamridah et al., 2025). The findings of this study suggest that ta'āruf offers an operational epistemological bridge between normative ideals and lived educational experiences. By framing diversity as an interactive learning process, ta'āruf enables multicultural education to move beyond rhetorical inclusion toward substantive engagement. (Yuliana & Riswanto, 2025)

Moreover, the integration of ta'āruf epistemology responds to critiques that multicultural education frequently neglects moral formation in favour of cultural recognition alone. Recent

scholarship emphasises reconnecting multicultural education with ethical responsibility and civic commitment (Wulandari & Hadinata, 2025). The epistemological orientation of ta'āruf addresses this gap by situating moral accountability at the centre of knowing the other. This reinforces the argument that revitalised education must cultivate not only revitalised competence but also ethical agency within plural societies. (Sibawaihi et al., 2025b)

Finally, when situated within the broader landscape of global multicultural education, ta'āruf epistemology offers a distinctive contribution from an Islamic intellectual tradition. Comparative studies suggest that non-Western epistemologies remain underrepresented in dominant multicultural education theories. This study affirms that ta'āruf does not contradict existing theories but extends them by introducing a spiritually grounded, ethically oriented epistemology. As such, ta'āruf epistemology contributes to the decolonisation in multicultural education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the fundamental weakness of Indonesian multicultural education is the fragility of its epistemological foundation, which is still instrumental and superficial. Vitalisation seems necessary by reviving the Ta'aruf Epistemology from Q.S. Al-Hujurāt, verse 13, as a new, relational, and transformative philosophical foundation. The synthesis of this epistemology with Freire's dialogic-practical theory and Banks' operational framework produces a comprehensive multicultural education model, in which Ta'aruf serves as the core paradigm that integrates critical reflection with social action. Theoretically, this study offers an alternative foundation grounded in Islamic values that dialogues with global education theory. In practice, this model provides a framework for transforming multicultural education from an additive to an integrative approach, thereby shaping students' relational competence and commitment to justice and strengthening Indonesia's pluralistic society.

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