

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN SHAPING MULTICULTURAL SOCIAL COHESION AMONG STUDENTS

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in shaping students' social cohesion at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, Central Aceh Regency. It employs a qualitative approach through field study methods. Qualitative data—namely the activities related to PAI curriculum implementation at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon—were obtained via in-depth interviews with the school principal, PAI teachers, and students, as well as through observation and documentation. Data were analyzed inductively through reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The results reveal that the implementation of the PAI curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon has been effective in fostering students' social awareness. PAI teachers play an active role not only in delivering instructional content but also in exemplifying and guiding students to live harmoniously amidst diversity. The internalization of social cohesion values is carried out through discussion methods, case studies, and experiential learning. The study concludes that the PAI curriculum contributes significantly to forming students' social cohesion when supported by appropriate teaching strategies and a conducive school environment. Strengthening teacher capacities and integrating multicultural values into the curriculum are necessary to make religious education a primary pillar in maintaining national social integrity.

### Keywords

Curriculum Implementation, Islamic Religious Education, Social Cohesion, Student Multiculturalism.



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country characterized by high diversity in ethnicity, culture, language, and religion (Sipuan et al., 2022); (Hasanudin, 2018). This diversity represents a valuable asset for national development, but also carries the potential for social conflict if not managed wisely (Mahyuddin, 2020); (Wula, 2022); (Lukluil Maknun, 2020). In that context, education plays a central role as a strategic instrument to strengthen national character and shape social cohesion (Intan & Handayani, 2017); (Setyorini et al., 2021); (Mumpuni et al., 2025); (Kurniawati & Matang, 2023). One primary pathway is through the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, which emphasizes not only cognitive dimensions but also affective and socio-religious aspects (Nuzulia et al., 2020); (Hasan, 2013); (Hazrullah, 2023). The PAI curriculum at the secondary level is designed to instill values of tolerance, peace, and coexistence in diversity, especially within culturally and socially complex communities (Mansur, 2016); (Budiantoro & Saputri, 2021); (Mukzizatin, 2019); (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018); (Nor Ipansyah et al., 2024); (Luthfi, 2016). However, in practice, the implementation of this curriculum is not always ideal (Mustafida, 2020); (Mansur, 2016); (Ashari, 2021); (Hakim & Darajat, 2023). Many schools struggle to effectively instill social cohesion values due to local cultural factors, limited pedagogical approaches, and educators' preparedness (Asra et al., 2021); (Zuhdi et al., 2022); (Arifin, 2019); (Wijaya, 2023); (Agung, 2019); (Kodoatie et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to examine in depth how the PAI curriculum is truly implemented in schools, especially in multicultural contexts such as SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, Central Aceh Regency.

SMA Negeri 1 Takengon operates in the Gayo highlands, which features unique social and cultural characteristics. Although the majority of students come from Islamic backgrounds, diversity remains evident in sub-ethnicity, religious practices, lifestyles, and family socio-economic status. In this context, PAI curriculum implementation becomes vital in fostering a spirit of togetherness, solidarity, and tolerance among students. The social cohesion values are instilled through PAI learning by integrating material relevant to multicultural life contexts, such as interfaith tolerance, respecting differing opinions, the importance of cooperation, and social justice values. Based on initial observations by the researcher at this school, several positive practices indicate the success of PAI teachers in linking Islamic values to students' real-life contexts, including thematic discussions on diversity issues, cross-background group work, and inclusive religious activities. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the PAI curriculum in shaping social cohesion still faces significant challenges,

particularly in pedagogical methodology and comprehensive school support.

The main challenges faced by PAI teachers in this context are the lack of contextual learning resources, insufficient training in multicultural pedagogical approaches, and psychological barriers among students in interacting with different background groups. Initial interviews with several teachers revealed that although social cohesion values are included in the Lesson Plan (RPP), in practice, they are often hindered by teacher-centered, lecturing approaches. Moreover, not all teachers possess adequate skills in using participatory methods, such as social project-based learning, conflict simulation, or values-based problem solving. School documentation data showed that only about 40% of PAI teachers routinely integrated diversity and tolerance issues into their teaching during the last semester. This indicates the need for a more systematic approach in developing PAI instructional strategies that support students' social cohesion. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which the PAI curriculum has been effectively implemented at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon in shaping students' harmonious, tolerant social attitudes and readiness to live together in diversity. The findings are expected to contribute academically to developing contextually appropriate PAI curriculum and pedagogy aligned with the needs of a multicultural Indonesian society.

Several previous studies have addressed the relationship between religious education, social cohesion, and student multiculturalism. For example, research by Asra, Khairulyadi, & Nusuary (2021) analyzed forms of social cohesion between local inhabitants (Gayo tribe) and migrants (Aceh tribe) in Kampung Mutiara, Bener Meriah. The results showed that social cohesion was shaped by values of tolerance, mutual cooperation, and preserved social solidarity despite ethnic differences. However, this social cohesion dynamic remained vulnerable to political and cultural issues not fully internalized by all societal levels (Asra et al., 2021).

Furthermore, Hakim & Darajat (2023) investigated multicultural education as a means of shaping national character and identity. Their study emphasized the importance of an educational curriculum integrating multicultural values to strengthen social cohesion and prevent identity-based social conflict. Its findings demonstrated that education plays a strategic role in creating an inclusive society that respects diversity (Hakim & Darajat, 2023). Kurniawati & Matang (2023) explored character formation based on Nusantara values, showing that instilling local cultural values such as tolerance, mutual cooperation, and a sense of togetherness can build students who are both nationalist and religious. However, this approach mainly focused on formal schooling

contexts and did not explore broader social interactions across communities (Kurniawati & Matang, 2023).

Setyorini et al. (2021) focused on strengthening national character through school culture, affirming that school culture—such as flag ceremonies, extracurricular activities, and teacher exemplars—can implant values of unity, patriotism, and tolerance in students. However, the study did not explicitly investigate the relationship between school culture and social cohesion among groups with different backgrounds (Setyorini et al., 2021). Wijaya (2023) examined social cohesion from the perspective of Prophet Muhammad's hadiths and their relevance to national stability. He found that hadiths encouraging brotherhood, unity of the ummah, and mutual help significantly contribute to building a peaceful and stable social order. Yet, the approach was normative-theological and lacked sociological analysis within Indonesia's multicultural society (Wijaya, 2023).

Finally, Zuhdi, Ramli, & Saleh (2022) researched the influence of social cohesion in digital communication interactions via WhatsApp. Their study showed that intensive communication in WhatsApp groups can strengthen a sense of togetherness and social solidarity amid limited physical interaction, especially during the pandemic. However, the social cohesion built in this digital space tends to be temporal and limited to specific communities (Zuhdi et al., 2022).

From these six studies, significant gaps exist in terms of approach and contextual focus. Most past studies still centered on formal education, digital communication, or normative studies, without specifically examining cross-cultural and interreligious social cohesion in grassroots community practices, particularly in heterogeneous regions such as Central Aceh Regency. In addition, research on the role of social cohesion in strengthening cross-ethnic and religious community stability is still rarely conducted in depth with a sociological-qualitative approach. This study offers novelty by examining contextual cross-ethnic and interreligious social cohesion in the pluralistic society of Central Aceh, Aceh Province, a region with a complex history of migration and social pluralism. This research not only analyzes normative cohesion values but also explores how these values are applied and sustained in everyday social interactions among residents from different backgrounds. With a qualitative approach based on field observation and in-depth interviews, this study is expected to contribute both empirically and theoretically to expanding the understanding of strategies for strengthening social cohesion in plural societies.

The concept of social cohesion has strong roots in Émile Durkheim's structural-functional theory. In his seminal work *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), Durkheim states that social cohesion is the adhesive that maintains societal integration through two forms of solidarity: mechanical and organic (Durkheim, 2003). Mechanical solidarity emerges in homogeneous societies with strong collective value systems, while organic solidarity develops in heterogeneous societies bonded by functional interdependence between individuals and groups. In the context of plural societies such as Indonesia, organic solidarity is more relevant to explaining how social cohesion is built through recognition of diversity and cross-group cooperation. Furthermore, national policies such as the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) emphasize the importance of strengthening social cohesion as a prerequisite for stability and sustainable national development, particularly in areas with potential identity-based conflict and social inequality. Therefore, policy approaches that promote social inclusion, reinforce pluralism values, and increase citizen participation are essential foundations for realizing a cohesive and peaceful society.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of cross-ethnic social cohesion in the lives of students at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, Central Aceh Regency, as well as to identify the factors that strengthen or weaken intergroup social relations in the local multicultural context. Theoretically, this research contributes to enriching the sociological literature on social cohesion through a contextual and interdisciplinary approach integrating dimensions of culture, religion, and local social dynamics. Pragmatically, the findings are expected to serve as references for local governments, community leaders, and educational institutions in designing social programs and inclusive policies capable of strengthening social solidarity and preventing identity-based conflict.

## METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach (Endah Marendah Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023) using a field research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in shaping social cohesion among students at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, Central Aceh Regency, Aceh Province. The qualitative approach was selected due to its suitability for addressing complex, contextual problems that are oriented toward interpreting the experiences of research subjects. The primary objective of this study is to explore in detail how the PAI curriculum is practiced in daily learning processes and how students respond to and internalize

the values of social cohesion through this educational engagement.

The research was conducted from May 1 to May 26, 2024. The research site was purposively selected, namely SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, located in the Gayo Lues area, considering its remote geographical location and the unique sociocultural complexity of its community. Although situated in a predominantly Muslim area, the school hosts students from relatively diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. This unique context makes the school a relevant setting to examine the extent to which the PAI curriculum contributes to creating a cohesive and harmonious environment.

The data for this research comprises activities related to the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sugiono, 2016). Observations were conducted participatively within the classroom during PAI learning sessions, focusing on teacher-student interactions, instructional methods, and the overall learning atmosphere. In-depth interviews were conducted with several key informants, including PAI teachers, the school principal, students, and curriculum staff, to gather information regarding curriculum implementation strategies, understanding of the social values taught, and students' perceptions of learning outcomes. The documentation process included the analysis of curriculum documents, syllabi, Lesson Plans (RPP), and assessment instruments used in PAI instruction. Informants were selected using purposive sampling (Karimuddin Abdullah et al., 2022), considering their involvement and knowledge related to the PAI learning process. The number of informants was determined based on the principle of information saturation, whereby data collection continued until the information obtained showed consistent patterns and no longer revealed new significant findings.

Data analysis followed the steps of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, as developed by Miles and Huberman (Burhan Bungin, 2007). The field data were categorized, compared, and interpreted within the framework of social cohesion theory and curriculum implementation. Data validity was reinforced through triangulation techniques—including source triangulation, method triangulation, and time triangulation—to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. With this methodology, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and contextual portrayal of how the implementation of the PAI curriculum contributes to the formation of social cohesion values among students, particularly in regions with distinct social and geographical characteristics, such as Central Aceh Regency.

# FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## Findings

The findings of this study were obtained through a series of observation activities, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The research revealed that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon extends beyond the formal aspects of classroom instruction and has transformed into a strategic medium for instilling the values of social cohesion amid students' diverse backgrounds. Within the multicultural context of the school, PAI plays a significant role in bridging social, cultural, and religious differences. The data indicate that the PAI curriculum is not solely aimed at cognitive achievements but also emphasizes affective and psychomotor dimensions through contextual, reflective, and collaborative learning activities. This is supported by the active role of teachers, school policies, and the synergy between intra- and extracurricular programs. The research findings are summarized in the following table, comprising four main units of analysis.

**Table 1.** Implementation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Shaping Multicultural Social Cohesion Among Students at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon

No	Unit of Analysis	Key Findings
1.	Curriculum Implementation	Holistically integrated into teaching, assessment, and school activities
2.	Value Internalization	Through contextual methods, teacher role models, social habituation, and curricular synergy
3.	Supporting Factors	Support from the principal, religious local culture, active PAI teachers, and the school's social climate
4.	Inhibiting Factors	Student background heterogeneity, limited PAI instructional time, and digital-era challenges

The implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon is carried out comprehensively and holistically, encompassing lesson planning, classroom implementation, assessment, and reinforcement through extracurricular activities. The curriculum is not merely treated as an administrative instrument, but as an integral part of the school's vision for shaping student character and social cohesion. In practice, the PAI curriculum is implemented through a participatory and dialogical teaching approach rather than a one-way transmission. PAI teachers strive to relate instructional materials to students' real-life situations, such as the importance of ukhuwah (brotherhood), tolerance, and empathy. Moreover, assessment systems are not limited to cognitive tests but also include the observation of attitudes, social interactions, and student engagement in school activities. Religious activities such as Rohani Islam (Rohis), Jumat Berkah, and

commemorations of Islamic holidays serve as external means to reinforce the teaching of PAI values. Additionally, the integration of local Gayo wisdom into lessons makes the curriculum more contextualized to students' social environments. This implementation strategy illustrates curriculum as praxis—a dynamic interaction between teachers, students, and the school environment. Through this approach, PAI becomes not just a subject to be taught but a lived experience collectively shaped within the school community.

The internalization of social cohesion values within PAI learning is carried out through a transformative and contextual approach. Values such as tolerance, solidarity, justice, and mutual respect are not only conveyed through verbal material or rote memorization but are embedded in reflective and dialogical learning experiences. PAI teachers serve as key actors in internalizing these values, both through their exemplary behavior and the design of cross-cultural interactive learning. Students are encouraged to engage in discussions about relevant social issues they encounter, such as disagreements, minor conflicts, or discriminatory behavior, and are guided to understand them through the lens of moderate Islamic values. Teacher role modeling serves as a primary instrument in the internalization process. Fairness, openness, and non-discrimination modeled by teachers become concrete examples that students emulate. Furthermore, social habituation practices—such as mutual greetings, cross-ethnic group work, and collaborative assignments—serve as mediums to enhance students' social awareness. Outside the classroom, activities such as spiritual mentoring, social service, and other religious programs help reinforce social cohesion values in a practical manner. Through this socially grounded and student-centered approach, PAI values are not only understood cognitively but are also manifested in students' daily attitudes and behaviors as members of a multicultural community.

The success of PAI implementation in fostering social cohesion at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon cannot be separated from several synergistic supporting factors. First, the principal's commitment to providing space, policy, and facilities for the enhancement of PAI is a critical foundation. The school leadership views PAI not as a curriculum supplement but as a fundamental pillar in character formation amid diversity. Second, the religious local culture of the Gayo community strengthens the social foundation of PAI learning. This culture fosters a spiritually calming environment that is accepting of differences. Third, the competence and dedication of PAI teachers are vital in executing pedagogical approaches that emphasize social values. Teachers act not only as instructors but also as moral and social mentors. Fourth, the school's inclusive social climate promotes a healthy and

open educational process. Collaborative activities inside and outside the classroom enhance social relationships among students across ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds. These factors contribute to a conducive learning environment for strengthening social cohesion values. When all school components work toward a shared vision, PAI values can be more effectively internalized by students, both consciously and through social habituation.

Although the implementation of PAI at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon has shown positive outcomes, several inhibiting factors require attention. One of the main challenges is the heterogeneity of students' backgrounds, including ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status. These differences sometimes pose a risk of social friction in student interactions, particularly if not managed properly by teachers and school authorities. In such cases, PAI often serves as a value-based buffer to address these differences, although the process is not always straightforward or swift. The second factor is the limited instructional time allocated for PAI in the formal curriculum. With constrained time, teachers are challenged to deliver rich content while also fostering deep social values—a demanding task in itself. A third significant factor is the influence of digital technology and social media, which often promote individualistic and consumerist values, conflicting with the spirit of solidarity and togetherness advocated by PAI. Additionally, not all students are effectively prepared to embrace the values of diversity and tolerance, necessitating continuous and varied pedagogical approaches. These obstacles indicate that while PAI holds strong potential as a medium for social cohesion, reinforcement is still needed in terms of curriculum policy, teacher roles, and family involvement to ensure these values are effectively instilled and lived by students in their everyday lives.

## **Discussion**

This study highlights the importance of implementing the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in fostering social cohesion among students at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon, Central Aceh Regency. Social cohesion in the educational context not only concerns students' ability to live harmoniously together, but also reflects the success of educational institutions in internalizing values of togetherness, mutual respect, and emotional attachment amid pluralism (Setyorini et al., 2021); (Rasyid, 2015); (Fitriani, 2018).

The findings indicate that the implementation of the PAI curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon goes beyond the delivery of teaching materials; it also functions as a vehicle for character development, particularly in terms of social cohesion. This aligns with views that emphasize the

pivotal role of religious education in fostering social solidarity within pluralistic societies (Fitriani, 2018). Within the school context, the PAI curriculum has served as a platform for strengthening such values, albeit not without technical and sociological challenges.

### **Implementation of the PAI Curriculum: between Regulation and Social Reality**

Interviews with the school principal and PAI teachers revealed that the implementation of the national curriculum is carried out by referring to competence standards, including spiritual and social attitudes, knowledge, and skills. However, teachers emphasized that the success of the implementation is largely determined by teachers' creativity in contextualizing the material into students' social lives.

This reflects a kind of "curriculum negotiation" between the formal curriculum documents and everyday pedagogical practices. Such negotiation is essential, as social cohesion is not a competence that can be achieved through lectures or memorization alone, but requires habituation, exemplary modeling, and direct experience (Fitriani, 2018); (Usman, 2015). Unsurprisingly, many teachers employ methods such as discussions, case studies, and social projects to instill values of togetherness.

This approach is consistent with constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge and values are constructed through active interaction with one's environment (Matusov, E & Hayes, 2000). When teachers succeed in creating contextual learning experiences, students are more likely to internalize the social values embedded in Islamic teachings.

### **Internalization of Social Cohesion Values: Where Religion Meets the Social**

Findings in the second sub-section demonstrate that social cohesion values such as solidarity, tolerance, compassion, and cooperation are not only taught theoretically but are internalized through participatory learning activities. Teachers such as actively engage students in value-based discussions, educational games, and even simple community service. This shows that PAI learning can serve as a bridge between faith and social action.

Interestingly, some teachers noted that students grasp social values more effectively when engaged in open dialogue about their own realities. In other words, democratic and reflective learning proves more effective than one-directional instruction. This strengthens Freire's (1970) idea of "education as the praxis of liberation," where teachers and students together make sense of their social reality (Freire, 2005).

However, it is important to note that the internalization process is not uniform across all students. Some teachers reported that differences in family background and the dominance of digital culture have led some students to become more individualistic or even apathetic toward social activities. This signals that curriculum and teaching methods must be continuously evaluated to adapt to contemporary needs.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors: Context as a Determinant of Effectiveness**

The interviews identified that the success of building social cohesion through the PAI curriculum is strongly influenced by a synergistic educational ecosystem. Teacher commitment, school leadership support, and a conducive school climate were found to be key factors in fostering unity among students. It is not an exaggeration to say that PAI teachers act as agents of social transformation who impart values through real-life actions.

However, several inhibiting factors must also be acknowledged. The limited instructional hours for PAI, the influence of social media, and students' low value literacy pose serious challenges (Djollong & Akbar, 2019); (Alfath, 2020). The instant culture and the tendency of students to consume superficial information on social media may dilute the significance of social cohesion values unless these are presented in ways that resonate with students' realities.

This phenomenon affirms that the internalization of PAI values requires broader policy support. The curriculum needs to provide greater space for character and social value reinforcement, not merely religious cognition. On the other hand, teachers should be equipped with pedagogical training that is responsive to the changing times.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

This research makes a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education theory in a multicultural context (Nurhabibi et al., 2025); (Kurniawati & Matang, 2023). Theoretically, the findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to implementing the PAI curriculum—an approach that prioritizes not only the transfer of knowledge but also the transformation of attitudes and social behavior (Wardani et al., 2022). Practically, the study highlights the need to reposition the role of PAI teachers as facilitators of humanistic and participatory learning (Djollong & Akbar, 2019). Teachers are not merely content providers but also social actors who bridge Islamic values with the challenge of fostering social cohesion in plural societies.

Moreover, policy interventions at the school and district levels are necessary to reinforce the role of the PAI curriculum in building social cohesion. This may include revising instructional time allocations, teacher training, integration of school-based social programs, and development of value-based learning modules (Latip, 2022).

The discussion reveals that the PAI curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon holds great potential for shaping students' social cohesion, provided that it is implemented through a humanistic, reflective, and contextual approach. However, this potential must be supported by institutional backing and collective awareness so that PAI learning is not confined to administrative routines but truly becomes a medium of students' social and spiritual transformation.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Takengon has made a positive contribution to fostering social cohesion among students. Through a learning process that emphasizes not only cognitive mastery but also affective and social aspects, PAI teachers play a key role in internalizing values such as tolerance, cooperation, empathy, and inclusiveness. Experiential learning, value-based discussions, and teacher role modeling serve as effective media for nurturing students' social awareness and appreciation for diversity. Supporting factors include teacher commitment, the school's religious culture, and strong leadership from the principal. However, challenges remain, such as limited instructional time, diverse student backgrounds, and the pervasive influence of social media that often propagates intolerant content. Based on these findings, it is recommended that value education within the PAI curriculum continue to be strengthened, both through curriculum revisions that emphasize social and multicultural dimensions and through the development of contextual and reflective teaching methods. PAI teachers also need to receive regular training in character- and cohesion-based pedagogy to effectively respond to the evolving dynamics of students in the digital era. Additionally, school principals are expected to create environments that support the integration of Islamic and social values harmoniously. Collaborative efforts among educational stakeholders are essential to ensure that the PAI curriculum serves not only as a formal policy document but also as a concrete instrument for reinforcing social unity amidst diversity.

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