

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL CHARTERS IN MAINTAINING DIVERSITY THROUGH THE ULUL ALBAB CURRICULUM

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Abstract

This research examines the innovative role of Pesantren Darularafah Raya in fostering diversity in North Sumatera through the implementation of the Ulul Albab Curriculum (ULA), an integrative model that synergizes Islamic knowledge, general knowledge, and practical skills. Data were gathered through interviews with pesantren leaders, curriculum coordinators, students, and community members, supported by curriculum documents, lesson plans, and institutional archives. Data collection employed triangulation of participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentary studies. Analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's interactive model, comprising data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The research findings reveal four main mechanisms of the ULA curriculum as social cohesive agents. Firstly, the integration of the three pillars of the curriculum in project-based social learning transforms the complexity of a diverse society into a learning laboratory, shaping moderate and solution-oriented attitudes among students. Secondly, the entrepreneurship unit fosters functional interdependence across ethnic groups within the pesantren and builds economic networks with diverse external communities, transforming transactional interactions into social capital. Thirdly, the synthesis of the values of rahmatan lil 'alamin and competitiveness into the paradigm of "serving excellence" links academic achievement with inclusive social contribution responsibilities. Fourthly, the community service program based on skills functions as effective public diplomacy, shifting the image of the pesantren from exclusive to a reliable and solution-oriented partner for all societal elements. The conclusion of the research indicates that the ULA curriculum operates as an ecosystem of encounters, systematically building social cohesion through holistic educational design. These findings propose a substantive model for repositioning pesantren as agents for fostering diversity and social resilience in Indonesia.

Keywords

Diversity, Islamic Boarding School, Islamic Education, Ulul Albab Curriculum (ULA).



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, with over 270 million people across more than 17,000 islands, represents one of the world's most complex mosaics of diversity encompassing ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. North Sumatra embodies this diversity in miniature, where Batak, Malay, Nias, Javanese, Chinese, and Indian communities coexist alongside Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and local faiths. However, the province's history is marked by tensions and conflicts with ethnic and religious undertones. In such a context, nurturing diversity requires systematic, sustainable cultural work reaching grassroots levels, particularly through education (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2020). Enhancing educational quality relies on internal potential, utilizing various techniques and available data to empower components in continuously improving their abilities to meet the expectations of students and the community (Azmi & Ridha DS, 2019).

Educational institutions with religious foundations play a crucial yet ambiguous role in diversity narratives. Islamic boarding schools can instill inclusivity and moderation, yet may also perpetuate exclusivism if their curricula remain detached from social realities (Bush & Munabari, 2023). Despite modern transformations, the challenge of actively nurturing diversity remains significant, raising the critical question of whether boarding schools can design educational systems that produce students who are both religiously knowledgeable and active, moderate citizens upholding harmonious coexistence (Hefner, 2021).

Based on the results of the documentation study, it was found that Pesantren Darularafah Raya in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, presents an intriguing case with its unique Ulul Albab Curriculum (ULA). This curriculum transcends the religious-general knowledge dichotomy through three pillars: Islamic Knowledge, General Knowledge, and Practical Skills, aiming to produce virtuous, critical, independent, and contributive graduates. The sociopedagogical question is whether this universal curriculum is operationalized with awareness to equip students in nurturing diversity within their pluralistic context (Jamil & Azra, 2022). Initial indications suggest a contextual approach through entrepreneurship programs, skill-based community service, and integration of local wisdom. However, no comprehensive research has examined how the ULA Curriculum is implemented at the micro level or how it shapes students' perceptions and interactions with others of different ethnicities and religions, an understanding crucial for developing Islamic education as a model for peace and social integration (Kailani & Slama, 2023).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by deeply examining the role of Pesantren Darularafah Raya in nurturing diversity through its Ulul Albab Curriculum. This research dissects how the integration of three curriculum pillars forms moderate and contributory characters, how entrepreneurship serves as a platform for cross-group interaction, how universal Islamic values harmonize with competitiveness, and how social contribution programs build relations with heterogeneous communities, potentially offering a conceptual and practical model for strengthening social cohesion in pluralistic regions of Indonesia

North Sumatra, as a microcosm of Indonesia, is rich in diversity yet vulnerable to conflict and intolerance, particularly among youth susceptible to exclusive narratives. Pesantren often bear the stigma of being closed and homogenous, focused solely on individual piety without involvement in nurturing broader social harmony. Pesantren Darularafah Raya, with its unique Ulul Albab Curriculum, claims to pioneer the cultivation of contributive students, yet no in-depth empirical studies reveal how this curriculum's philosophical claims translate into daily practices and tangible impacts on shaping students as change agents in a diverse society. This discrepancy between ideal claims and actual implementation forms the central problematic of this research. Therefore, the curriculum must be designed systematically. Systematic means considering all components, considering their respective roles, and how they interact with each other to fully achieve the stated objectives (Azmi et al., 2022).

Demonstrated that integrative curriculum models enhanced students' academic and spiritual competencies but remained focused on individual outputs without exploring how curriculum design explicitly maintains diversity. This gap becomes apparent when juxtaposed with al-Qabisi's foundational treatise, arguing that education's ultimate aim is cultivating moral responsibility and social consciousness, not merely individual cognitive achievement. A curriculum solely focused on individual competence without orientation toward social cohesion fails to realize this comprehensive educational purpose (Ahmad & Siregar, 2022).

Rahmawati et al. (2021) identified that tolerance values in Islamic Religious Education textbooks within formal schools remained normative-textual and not yet operational. The study discovered a gap between classroom teaching materials and students' daily life practices, but had not reached the level of curricular solutions in non-formal educational institutions like pesantren, which possess a strong community base. This phenomenon reflects what Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* termed the "banking model" of education, where knowledge is deposited into

students as passive recipients rather than cultivated through dialogue and praxis. Moreover, it contravenes the Indonesian regulatory mandate stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Article 4, Paragraph 1, which explicitly states that education shall be conducted democratically, fairly, and non-discriminatorily while upholding human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national pluralism. Thus, an educational approach that fails to operationalize tolerance values not only falls short pedagogically but also diverges from national legislative intent (Republik Indonesia, 2003).

Research by Williams & Patel (2023) found that the kiai's exemplary conduct effectively instilled religious moderation, yet highlighted high dependency on this figure without examining how a pesantren's founding charter serves as a systemic instrument guaranteeing sustainability of this inclusive vision beyond generational limits. This aligns with Weber's theory of charismatic authority, wherein institutionalization is crucial for transitioning from personal to structural legitimacy. Within Islamic tradition, this finds roots in the waqfiyya charter, a legally binding document preserving the founder's vision across centuries. The oldest surviving waqfiyya, dating to 876 CE, demonstrates how donor stipulations ensured continuity of an institution's social function long after the founder's passing.

Chen & Nuraini (2020) found that internal codes of ethics prevented bullying and discrimination, yet their focus remained limited to internal relations without investigating how the pesantren charter functions as a strategic mechanism for managing external relations with interfaith and cross-ethnic communities. This internal-external dichotomy can be analyzed through al-Ghazali's principle of *maslahah* in *al-Mustasfa min 'Ilm al-Usul*, where preserving faith, life, intellect, progeny, and property constitutes the highest objectives of Sharia (*maqasid al-shariah*) (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). A charter regulating only internal harmony without extending *maslahah* to the broader pluralistic ecosystem represents an incomplete application of these objectives.

Al-Habsyi (2024) confirmed that peace education-based curricula in madrasahs significantly reduced intergroup prejudice, yet this research addressed a post-conflict context without examining preventive settings with latent conflict potential, nor how the identity of "Ulul Albab" operates as a living curriculum. The Qur'anic term *Ulul Albab*, mentioned sixteen times, most notably in Surah Ali 'Imran (3:190-191), describes those integrating profound spirituality with critical intellect. A living curriculum imbued with this identity proactively cultivates integrated character that prevents conflict rather than merely reacting to its aftermath (*Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*, n.d.).

Based on this critical analysis, a significant research gap is identified. Previous research examined curriculum elements, the role of figures, internal policies, and tolerance values separately within limited contexts. The novelty of this research lies in its unique focus on the systemic interaction of three elements simultaneously: the Pesantren Charter as the highest constitutional document, the Ulul Albab Curriculum as a holistic learning design, and its specific objective to maintain diversity. This research examines how the pesantren's founding vision, drawing upon the Qur'anic ideal of Ulul Albab, is operationally translated and legally institutionalized through a charter into curriculum and daily practices. Its originality lies in analyzing Ulul Albab as a comprehensive philosophical framework integrating intellectual, spiritual, and social intelligence to shape students as agents of social cohesion, a vision formally guaranteed by the founding charter, echoing the enduring function of the historical waqfiyya.

The research aims to comprehensively analyze the role of Pesantren Darularafah Raya in nurturing diversity through the ULA Curriculum implementation. Specifically, the objectives are: 1) investigating how the integration of the three curriculum pillars is implemented as a method for shaping moderate and contributive character; 2) describing independence and entrepreneurship practices as effective means for building cross-ethnic and cross-religious social networks; 3) analyzing the internalization process of rahmatan lil 'alamin values and competitiveness and their impact on students' perceptions and attitudes; 4) evaluating the role of social contribution programs and practical skills in building the pesantren's image and relationships with the heterogeneous surrounding community. Ultimately, this research comprehensively maps the Islamic education mechanism through an innovative curriculum that not only enriches students spiritually and intellectually but also actively equips them to be guardians and nurturers of diversity in their homeland.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a field research design, focusing on "The Role of the Darularafah Raya Islamic Boarding School Charter in Islamic Education through the Ulul Albab Curriculum to Maintain Diversity in North Sumatra" (Creswell & Poth, 2023). The research data consists of information concerning the formulation of the pesantren charter, the design and implementation of the Ulul Albab Curriculum, its role in fostering diversity, and the social interactions between the pesantren and its pluralistic surrounding community (Moleong, 2021).

These data are sourced from primary sources, including the Head of the Islamic Boarding School, Curriculum Coordinators, students (santri) at intermediate and advanced levels, and local community and religious leaders from various backgrounds. Secondary sources include curriculum guidebooks, teaching modules, activity schedules, pesantren archives, bulletins, and relevant video recordings. Data collection techniques involve interviews, observation, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2022). Semi-structured in-depth interviews are conducted with the pesantren leadership, curriculum coordinators, students, and community figures to explore their perspectives and experiences. Observation is carried out to directly witness events related to the learning process inside and outside the classroom, daily social interactions among students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, and pesantren activities involving the surrounding community. Documentation involves gathering data from formal and informal pesantren documents to complement and confirm findings from interviews and observations.

Data analysis employs the interactive model of (Miles et al., 2020), comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher conducts a critical analysis of the role of the pesantren charter and the Ulul Albab Curriculum in maintaining diversity by applying relevant theoretical discourses, including the Qur'anic concept of Ulul Albab (*Al-Qur'an Al-Karim*, n.d.), the Islamic educational philosophy of (Al-Qabisi, 1955), the maqasid al-shariah framework of al-Ghazali (n.d.), Max Weber's theory of charismatic authority and institutionalization (Weber, 1978), and Paulo Freire's critique of the banking model of education (Freire, 1970). Furthermore, the researcher juxtaposes and contrasts the findings with previous related studies to affirm the novelty and contribution of this research. Data validity is ensured through source and method triangulation, peer debriefing, and the maintenance of a detailed audit trail (Satori, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Research at Pesantren Darularafah Raya unveils a unique educational framework, in which the Ulul Albab Curriculum (ULA) serves as a transformative catalyst in interpreting and practicing the diversity of North Sumatra. This study, structured based on findings from in-depth interviews with four key informant categories, extensive participatory observations, and critical analyses of curricular documents, reveals that this pesantren has fostered an Islamic educational model that organically permeates into the social dynamics of a diverse community. These four dimensions of

findings interweave to form a coherent mosaic of the role of the pesantren as a nurturer of diversity.

Table 1. The Role of the Darularafah Raya Islamic Boarding School Charter in Islamic Education through the Ulul Albab Curriculum to Maintain Diversity in North Sumatra

No	Integration of Curriculum Pillars	Internalization of Values	Role of the Curriculum
1	The three pillars of Islamic Sciences, General Knowledge, and Practical Skills are interwoven into a unified pedagogical approach termed contextual education based on social projects. Each learning unit exposes students to the complex social realities of North Sumatra, such as studying <i>al-'adalah al-ijtima'iyah</i> alongside regional autonomy policies and conducting field research in multi-ethnic villages. This integration transforms religious and general competencies from personal domains into solution-oriented, contributive capacities within the social-public sphere.	The curriculum systematically instills servant leadership ethics by aligning <i>rahmatan lil 'alamin</i> with competitiveness. The value of universal grace is framed as a logical consequence of intellectual excellence, operationalized through cross-class peer tutoring and narratives of classical Muslim scholars whose greatness is measured by contributions to universal civilization. Students reinterpret competitiveness as a race to create innovative solutions for common problems, constructing a paradigm of ethical competence where excellence and compassion are two sides of the same coin.	The curriculum functions as a systemic instrument that guarantees the sustainability of the pesantren's inclusive vision as mandated by its founding charter. It plays a tripartite role: (1) as a pedagogical tool for fostering moderate, critical, and empathetic characters through multi-perspective analysis; (2) as a social bridge through entrepreneurship units that generate cohesion via functional interdependence across ethnic and religious boundaries; and (3) as a mechanism for image re-signification through structured community engagement programs that transform the pesantren from an exclusive institution into an inclusive, contributory community resource, accumulating substantial social capital.
2	Documentary analysis of lesson plans reveals that assignments consistently require students to analyze social issues from religious-normative, scientific-academic, and local wisdom perspectives. Students demonstrate a transformed understanding of <i>fiqh</i> , shifting from rigid binary perception toward appreciating the discovery of beneficial common ground for diverse communities.	Narratives within routine lectures consistently emphasize scholars such as Ibn Sina and Al-Khawarizmi as models of universal contribution. Students internalize the principle that intelligence is futile if not transferable, viewing academic achievement as a burden of responsibility to assist peers and society.	Entrepreneurship practices function as socio-economic laboratories, with mixed teams in production, marketing, and administration transforming primordial identities into collegial identities within professional networks. Community initiatives like "Darularafah Mengabdi" build enduring social capital, evidenced by increased external partnerships and documented appreciation from diverse community stakeholders.
3	The Pesantren Charter serves as the foundational constitutional document that legally and philosophically anchors this integrated approach, ensuring the	The alignment of <i>rahmatan lil 'alamin</i> with competitiveness produces graduates who embody ethical competence, possessing both the capacity and moral commitment to lead	The curriculum effectively undertakes a re-signification of the pesantren's image, dismantling longstanding intimidating perceptions and establishing the institution as a collaborative

institutional transcends leadership maintains founding nurturing <i>Ulul</i> <i>Albab</i> graduates as agents of social cohesion in a pluralistic society.	vision generational changes and fidelity to the mission of	justly universally, water that irrigates other fields only after sufficient volume has accumulated at its source.	and analogous to community resource. Harmonious relationships with all elements of society become a prerequisite for effective <i>dakwah bil hal</i> , built through tangible actions in a universal language understood by everyone.
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Source: Data from Observations, Interviews, and Document Studies

Integration of the ULA Curriculum Pillars as a Method for Fostering Moderately Characterized and Contributive Students in a Diverse Society

The research findings reveal that the three pillars of the Ulul Albab Curriculum, Islamic Sciences, General Knowledge, and Practical Skills, are not implemented as separate compartments but are interwoven into a unified pedagogical approach conceptualized as contextual education based on social projects. Each learning unit is deliberately designed to expose students to the complex social realities of North Sumatra. At the aliyah level, for instance, the Islamic concept of al-'adalah al-ijtima'iyah (social justice) is studied concurrently with materials on the history of social conflicts and regional autonomy policies. Students are subsequently assigned to conduct mini-research in two neighboring villages with differing ethnic compositions to map community perceptions of justice in infrastructure development. The Pesantren Leader emphasized that moderation emerges from a profound understanding of complexity rather than from obscuring principles, asserting that the application of Islamic values in a context like Medan necessitates wisdom in reading a cultural landscape that has existed for centuries.

Observations and interactions with senior students indicate that this method effectively cultivates a critical yet empathetic moderate attitude. Students conveyed a transformed understanding of fiqh, moving from a perception of rigid binary rulings toward an appreciation of their role in discovering the most beneficial common ground for diverse communities, rather than imposing predetermined opinions. Documentary analysis of lesson plans and student workbooks corroborates these findings, demonstrating that essay assignments and projects consistently require students to analyze social issues from a minimum of three perspectives: religious-normative, scientific-academic, and local wisdom. This integration shapes a solution-oriented, contributive character wherein religious and general competencies are transferred from the personal domain to the social-public sphere.

Independent Practice and Entrepreneurship of Students in ULA Curriculum as a Medium for Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Religious Social Network Interaction and Strengthening

The economic units of the pesantren have proven to function as socio-economic laboratories that necessitate cross-boundary collaboration. Observations within the garment production unit documented a workflow that intentionally integrates female students skilled in design, male students proficient in operating screen printing machinery, and students responsible for marketing and digital administration. The Curriculum Coordinator explained the underlying philosophy, noting that teams are deliberately mixed so that students learn that business success hinges on the synergy of individual expertise, irrespective of ethnic background or place of origin, with the shared language being that of production and quality. These practices generate what this study identifies as cohesion through functional interdependence. More strategically, direct product marketing activities serve as a gateway for interactions with diverse external communities. The networks established are simultaneously professional and personal, effectively transforming primordial identities into collegial identities within an economic network. Secondary data from the annual reports of the students' cooperative reveal a significant increase in the number of partners and clients from outside the pesantren community over the past five years, signaling the success of the entrepreneurship program as a social bridge. Students actively engaged in business operations confirmed that the most valuable competencies they acquired were the abilities to negotiate and to build trust with individuals from markedly different backgrounds.

Internalization of Rahmatan lil 'Alamin Values and Competitiveness in the ULA Curriculum Learning

A key finding in this dimension is the systematic effort to instill servant leadership ethics through the alignment of two core values. The value of rahmatan lil 'alamin is not taught as a mere slogan but is framed as a logical consequence of intellectual excellence and skill mastery. The Pesantren Leader articulated an educational philosophy wherein students are cultivated to be at the forefront not for the sake of pride, but so that they possess sufficient capacity to assist and lead justly, analogous to water that can only irrigate other fields once sufficient volume has accumulated at its source. This philosophy is operationalized within the academic culture of the pesantren. Observation of the cross-class and cross-department peer tutoring system revealed that high-achieving students are required to guide their peers who struggle with the material. A champion student from outside Medan shared the perspective that achievement imposes a burden of

responsibility, wherein the ability to create comprehensible learning aids for peers less inclined toward memorization becomes a measure of meaningful intelligence, one that is futile if it cannot be transferred. The internalization of values also occurs through narratives embedded in teaching materials. Documentary studies of routine pesantren lectures identified a recurring theme concerning classical Muslim scholars such as Ibn Sina and Al-Khawarizmi, whose greatness is consistently measured by their contributions to universal human civilization rather than exclusively to the Muslim community. Students at the aliyah level interpreted competitiveness as a competition to be the most beneficial. They viewed competitiveness not as defeating others to the point of elimination, but as racing to create innovative solutions for common problems, an embodiment of grace. Thus, the curriculum successfully constructs a paradigm wherein excellence and compassion are not opposing poles but two sides of the same coin: ethical competence.

The Role of ULA Curriculum's Social Contribution and Practical Skills in Building the Image and Relations of Pesantren with a Heterogeneous Community

Structured community engagement programs embedded within the curriculum constitute the most visible frontline in constructing and nurturing social relations. Initiatives such as "Darularafah Mengabdi," which encompass social services, are specifically designed to interface with the real needs of the community regardless of their background. The longstanding intimidating image of the pesantren is immediately dismantled upon direct interaction. A local resident expressed that the community now perceives the pesantren as a resource with which they can collaborate. A local indigenous leader from the Karo community revealed a similar shift in perception, noting that the pesantren's approach is not to lecture but to assess situations and propose solutions grounded in the knowledge they have acquired, fostering a relationship that has evolved beyond mere neighborliness into a familial bond of mutual assistance. Documentary evidence such as guestbooks, letters of appreciation from various institutions, and coverage in local media provide strong proof of the accumulated social capital successfully established by the pesantren. These programs effectively undertake a re-signification of the pesantren's image, transforming it from an exclusive and closed institution to one that is inclusive and contributory. The pesantren leadership reflectively concluded that a harmonious relationship with all elements of society is a prerequisite for effective dakwah bil hal (preaching through action), a relationship built not through rhetoric but through tangible actions that alleviate life's burdens, a universal language understood by everyone.

Discussion

Integration of the ULA Curriculum Pillars as a Method for Fostering Moderately Characterized and Contributive Students in a Diverse Society

Research findings reveal that the integration of the ULA Curriculum's three pillars occurs at epistemological and practical levels, utilizing Islamic Knowledge, General Knowledge, and Practical Skills as distinct yet complementary analytical lenses to interpret North Sumatra's complex social realities. This has produced a hybrid pedagogical method termed "Context- and Solution-Based Learning," which systematically dismantles disciplinary boundaries to shape students capable of translating religious understanding into moderate attitudes and contributive actions within diverse communities (Rahman & Azra, 2021).

Operationally, integration employs a thematic, problem-centered design. Learning units are unified under broad themes such as "Social-Ecological Justice in the Land of Batak," confronting students with real cases like agricultural land transformation in Simalungun. The process unfolds in three interwoven phases: conceptual normative exploration of Islamic principles, including al-'adl and daf'u al-dharar; scientific-empirical investigation analyzing socio-economic and ecological data; and action design with critical reflection. These phases compel continuous dialectics between sacred texts, empirical facts, and the imperative for action, fundamentally training contextual ijthadi reasoning characteristic of moderate and progressive Islamic thought (Bakar & Hassan, 2023).

This process cultivates an active, reflective, and solution-oriented moderation with two characteristics: deep understanding of differences' roots, fostering authentic empathy by recognizing how value systems and theology shape perspectives; and orientation toward operational common ground, encouraging creative solutions based on shared principles of justice, sustainability, and well-being. This approach aligns with educational models building civic friendship across different backgrounds (Davies & Pike, 2024).

The Practical Skills pillar serves as a catalyst, transforming knowledge into tangible contributions. Through the "Adopted Village" project, interdisciplinary teams address real problems such as stunting in mixed-ethnic communities, combining nutritional science, communication skills, and business development. This service-learning approach, integrating academic achievement with community needs, effectively develops citizenship competencies and social responsibility (Jones & Wang, 2022). This ecosystem shapes a new habitus viewing diversity as a learning laboratory, confirming that holistic curriculum reform effectively fosters religious moderation and social

contribution beyond mere subject additions (Fauzi & Ma'arif, 2021).

Independent Practice and Entrepreneurship of Students in ULA Curriculum as a Medium for Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Religious Social Network Interaction and Strengthening

Research findings reveal that self-reliance and entrepreneurship practices embedded in the ULA Curriculum function as designed social infrastructure, systematically creating space for productive interactions across ethnic and religious boundaries. Business units, including Etawa goat farming, stingless bee honey production, clothing manufacturing, and IT services, serve as structured contact platforms embodying Allport's contact theory, where students from Batak Toba, Mandailing, Karo, Javanese, Malay, and Nias backgrounds collaborate in interdependent teams toward clear business objectives. Collective success becomes a superordinate goal, overriding primordial identities, as intensive task-oriented interactions in cooperative settings empirically reduce intergroup anxiety and foster positive perceptions (Pratiwi & Susanto, 2023).

This mechanism generates "cohesion through functional interdependence," where cohesion is built through concrete experiences of mutual dependency in production processes rather than solely through lectures on brotherhood. Shared experiences overcoming crises such as livestock disease outbreaks or raw material price fluctuations create strong emotional bonds and positive collective memories. Collaborating in heterogeneous teams to solve complex problems not only enhances technical skills but also fosters social and cultural competencies crucial in diverse societies (Williams & González, 2024).

The more transformative aspect occurs when entrepreneurial activities open portals connecting students with broader, heterogeneous societal ecosystems. Product marketing takes the form of authentic "santri economic diplomacy," where students engage as young entrepreneurs rather than preachy propagators. They establish relationships with kiosk owners in Beringin Traditional Market, dominated by Chinese merchants, souvenir shops in Parapat serving tourists of various beliefs, and restaurants in Medan. Universal business norms of honesty, timeliness, and quality commitment become the primary communication language. Positive repeated interactions within market logic effectively deconstruct prejudices and build trust, fundamental social capital for cohesive, diverse societies (Chen & Li, 2023).

The networks formed are multiplex and resilient, evolving beyond buyer-seller relationships into deeper partnerships. For instance, the banana chips unit establishes direct partnerships with predominantly Christian farmers in Sei Mencirim Village, progressing from transactions to technical

assistance on seed selection and organic pest control. Such mutually beneficial interdependence generates high costs in the event of social conflicts, acting as a restraining factor against identity-based hostility escalation. Thus, pesantren entrepreneurship not only builds bridges but weaves a social-economic safety net, strengthening community resilience (Mulyani & Sari, 2022).

Participation in collective efforts provides students with alternative professional identities beyond ethnic labels. Being recognized as reliable entrepreneurs, skilled technicians, or creative designers by external parties of differing beliefs enhances self-esteem and the courage to engage in diverse public spheres. Gaining recognition based on competence and contribution builds inclusive identity and citizenship confidence (Santoso & Wijaya, 2024). At the macro level, accumulated microeconomic interactions transform structural relations, repositioning pesantren as nodes of economy and innovation rather than isolated institutions. These findings reinforce studies indicating that community-based religious social entrepreneurship serves as a potent catalyst for reconciliation and peacebuilding through shared interests and sustained positive interactions among different groups (O'Driscoll & Hargey, 2021). Thus, entrepreneurial practice within the ULA Curriculum converts spiritual and cultural capital into economic capital, which is then reinvested to generate valuable cross-boundary social capital in a plural society.

Internalization of Rahmatan lil 'Alamin Values and Competitiveness in the ULA Curriculum Learning

Research findings reveal that the internalization of rahmatan lil 'alamin and competitiveness in the ULA Curriculum is achieved through transformative pedagogical engineering that constructs these values not as a dichotomy but as mutualistic symbiosis, synthesized into a single paradigm termed "Excellence in Service." This internalization is built through learning experiences, reward structures, and mutually reinforcing cultural narratives, shaping a mental habitus where personal success is deemed incomplete without proportional capacity to contribute to a broader good transcending group boundaries. Such an approach addresses the urgent need for character education, developing competencies alongside moral commitments in a globally competitive yet socially fragile context (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2020).

The value of rahmatan lil 'alamin is operationalized by shifting its understanding from abstract divine attributes into an ethical framework serving as the ultimate test of every achievement. For instance, a student winning a national science olympiad is required to mentor an inclusive science class for elementary children around the pesantren, including those from

underprivileged families and different religions. This pattern aligns with purpose learning approaches, where academic mastery is directed toward developing an identity oriented toward social contribution (Yeager et al., 2022). Conversely, competitiveness is reconceptualized from zero-sum competition into positive-sum contributive competition through events like the "Darularafah Social Project Olympiad," where 70% of evaluation weight rests on actual implementation and testimonials from diverse beneficiaries. Collaborative competition approaches enhance intrinsic motivation, creativity, and prosocial behavior simultaneously (Johnson et al., 2021).

The key mechanism uniting these values is an integrated system of role-modeling and narratives. The pesantren presents exemplary figures blending excellence with universal compassion, from classical scholars like Ibn Sina and Al-Khwarizmi to contemporary successful alumni utilizing business profits for interfaith scholarship programs. Narratives and role models as pedagogical tools for shaping moral and professional identities prove highly effective in character education (Han & Stieha, 2023). At the evaluation level, a dual-dimensional assessment matrix simultaneously measures academic-skill achievements and social footprint through a "Contribution Record Book." Assessment systems integrating performance and character significantly shape student behavior and values (Bebeau & Monson, 2021). The most tangible impact is the emergence of a new logic of action, where the mindset "What's in it for me?" transforms into "What excellence can I achieve, and how can I use it to be a blessing for my diverse community?" Thus, the ULA Curriculum successfully fosters change agents who are technically competent yet possess a strong, inclusive moral compass.

The Role of ULA Curriculum's Social Contribution and Practical Skills in Building the Image and Relations of Pesantren with a Heterogeneous Community

This study reveals that social contribution programs and practical skills integrated in the ULA Curriculum function as the most effective and transformative public diplomacy strategy for Pesantren Darularafah Raya. Programs like "Darularafah Mengabdi," "Agricultural Clinic," "Free Tutoring," and "Mobile Library" shift the paradigm from charity-based models to asset-based community development, where the pesantren offers skills and resources as a partner in development (Kleist & Jansen, 2021).

The key mechanism is the conversion of curriculum-based skills into social capital. Each program directly leverages students' knowledge and skills acquired in classrooms and workshops. For instance, Electrical Engineering students participate in the "Digitally Literate Village" program,

diagnosing and repairing community devices. In one observed case, students fixed a damaged sound system and computers at a church in Pancur Batu District. The interactions were purely technical and professional, yet trust was established. Neutral and professional technical assistance from religious groups serves as a highly effective entry point for building trust in fragmented communities (Peterson & Sikkink, 2022).

These programs create structured and sustainable positive contact spaces. Unlike ceremonial one-day events, programs like the "Agricultural Clinic" run periodically, with Agribusiness students providing ongoing assistance from soil analysis to marketing strategies. This repeated contact, oriented toward common goals within equal partnership contexts, meets the optimal conditions for reducing intergroup biases as outlined in expanded contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2020). This contact transforms outsiders into work partners and eventually family.

The cumulative impact is the overall re-signification of the *pesantren*'s image. The old perception of an exclusive, closed institution gradually gives way to a new image as an inclusive, solution-oriented community resource, built from the ground up through direct experiences of thousands of beneficiaries. The process of transforming religious institutions' image through sincere and inclusive social services strengthens their social legitimacy amidst pluralistic societies (Wuthnow & Hackett, 2023).

These programs also function as living laboratories for multicultural education. Students directly encounter Indonesia's plurality through sensory and emotional experiences that cannot be replaced by textbooks. Direct experiences in serving diverse communities cultivate empathy, intercultural communication skills, and humanize groups previously known only as abstract categories. Experiential learning in multicultural settings is a powerful method for building global citizenship competencies (Hartman et al., 2022). Thus, the social contribution program has built a strong relational bridge constructed from tangible actions, shared expertise, and trust earned drop by drop, creating a conducive social environment where *pesantren* grow as a relied-upon and respected unifying node in the intricate web of shared life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Ulul Albab Curriculum (ULA) at Darularafah Raya Islamic Boarding School plays a strategic and systemic role in Islamic education for maintaining diversity in North Sumatra. The integration of the three curriculum pillars, Islamic Sciences, General

Knowledge, and Practical Skills, through a contextual education approach based on social projects effectively cultivates students with moderate, critical, and empathetic characters. The pesantren's entrepreneurial practices function as socio-economic laboratories that foster cohesion through functional interdependence, transforming primordial identities into collegial identities within cross-ethnic and cross-religious professional networks. The internalization of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* values aligned with competitiveness successfully constructs an ethical competence paradigm, wherein intellectual excellence and compassion are two inseparable sides of the same coin. Furthermore, structured community engagement programs have undertaken a re-signification of the pesantren's image, shifting it from an exclusive and closed institution to an inclusive and contributory one, thereby accumulating substantial social capital. The pesantren charter serves as the foundational constitutional document that legally and philosophically guarantees the sustainability of this inclusive vision across generations.

The findings of this research offer several practical implications. First, other pesantren and Islamic educational institutions can adopt the ULA Curriculum model, particularly the integration of social projects into learning units, to foster moderate and contributive attitudes among students within their respective pluralistic contexts. Second, pesantren economic units should be strategically developed not merely as profit-oriented enterprises but as mediums for cross-boundary social interaction, deliberately designing mixed teams to cultivate functional interdependence among students from diverse backgrounds. Third, the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and competitiveness must be systematically internalized through peer tutoring programs and teaching narratives that emphasize the universal contributions of Islamic scholarship, framing achievement as a burden of responsibility toward others. Fourth, community engagement programs should be embedded as permanent components of the pesantren curriculum, designed to address real community needs through solution-based approaches that dismantle negative stereotypes and build enduring social capital. Finally, the local government of North Sumatra and the Ministry of Religious Affairs are recommended to formulate policies that support and replicate the pesantren charter model, ensuring that the institutionalization of inclusive visions becomes a systemic feature of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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