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WHEN DIVERSITY BECOMES EXCELLENCE: LESSONS FROM A PLURAL SCHOOL PREPARING PROSPECTIVE ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS IN UNIVERSITAS TERBUKA, INDONESIA

Achmad Anwar Abidin

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia (achmad.official@ecampus.ut.ac.id)

Kata Kunci:	ABSTRAK
Pendidikan Multikultural; Pendidikan Agama Islam; Analisis Kebutuhan; Calon Guru; Universitas Terbuka;	Indonesia membutuhkan guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) yang mampu mengajarkan agama sekaligus merawat keberagaman. Universitas Terbuka (UT), sebagai perguruan tinggi jarak jauh yang hadir di setiap provinsi, memiliki posisi strategis untuk menyiapkan guru tersebut, tetapi kurikulum PAI-nya belum secara eksplisit membekali mahasiswa dengan kompetensi multikultural. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis urgensi dan kebutuhan pendidikan multikultural bagi mahasiswa PAI UT dari perspektif sekolah pengguna lulusan, sebagai tahap analisis dalam pengembangan model kurikulum. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan diskusi terfokus di SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan. Data dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan pendidikan multikultural di SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda berhasil menjadikan sekolah tersebut sekolah unggul yang berwawasan multikultural SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan terbukti unggul sebagai sekolah multikultural karena secara konsisten menerapkan nilai kebhinekaan melalui praktik pendidikan multikultural dalam pembelajaran dengan komposisi siswa dan pengajar yang heterogen dari berbagai etnis, agama, serta status sosial ekonomi, serta integrasi kurikulum multikultural dan Kelas Keragaman yang efektif menghapus prasangka sosial sehingga lingkungan belajar tetap harmonis tanpa konflik berbasis SARA. Sekolah model seperti ini tentu membutuhkan guru PAI yang memiliki kepekaan multikultural yang tinggi disamping penguasaan materi pembelajaran yang baik. Temuan ini menegaskan urgensi pengembangan kurikulum PAI berwawasan multikultural di Universitas Terbuka yang memungkinkan mahasiswa dari berbagai provinsi berlatih mengajar di lingkungan sekolah yang multikultural

Keywords:	ABSTRACTS
Multicultural Education; Islamic Religious Education; Needs Analysis; Prospective Teachers;	Indonesia needs Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers who can teach religion while caring for diversity. The Universitas Terbuka (UT), as a distance university present in every province, has a strategic position to prepare such teachers, but its IRE curriculum has not explicitly equipped students with multicultural competencies. This study aims to analyse the urgency and need of multicultural education for IRE UT students from the perspective of graduate user schools, as an analysis stage in the development of a curriculum model. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and focused discussions at High School (SMA) Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan. The data was analysed thematically. The results of the study show that the implementation of multicultural education at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda has succeeded in making the school a superior school with a multicultural perspective. SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan has proven to be superior as a multicultural school because it consistently applies the value of diversity through the existence of houses of worship of five religions side by side in the school complex, the heterogeneous composition of students and teachers from various ethnicities, religions, and socioeconomic statuses, as well as the integration of multicultural curriculum and diversity classes that effectively eliminate social prejudices so that the learning environment remains harmonious without discrimination. Schools like this certainly require IRE teachers who have high multicultural sensitivity in addition to mastery of good learning materials. These findings affirm the urgency of developing a multicultural IRE curriculum at Universitas Terbuka that allows students from various provinces to practice teaching in a multicultural school environment.

A. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world as well as home to hundreds of ethnic groups, languages, and traditions spread across thousands of islands. This diversity is a wealth, but also a source of vulnerability. The experience of conflicts in Poso, Ambon, and Kalimantan shows that misunderstandings over ethnic, cultural, and religious differences can lead to violence, especially when regional autonomy gives rise to local egocentrism (Abidin & Muradllo, 2020). Therefore, schools are required not only to shape students' religious identities, but also the ability to coexist with others.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers are at the center of these demands. The way IRE teachers understand and teach differences determines whether religion in the classroom becomes a bridge or a dividing wall. On the other hand, the school landscape in Indonesia is increasingly diverse: there are schools and madrassas that combine the study of the Qur'an with science, and there are schools that deliberately build interfaith and ethnic interactions as the core of their education. Prospective IRE teachers need to be ready to enter both types of schools.

Studies on multicultural education in Indonesia show that there is a gap between policy and practice. Raihani (2018) found that the multicultural spirit in the National Education System Law 2003 has not been consistently translated in schools due to unexplicit policies and limited capacity of decision-makers and teachers. Religious lessons, which in Indonesia are taught separately according to students' religions, can be a learning space for interreligious tolerance if teachers and school culture support it (Parker, 2014). On the other hand, Indonesia's religious public space is also colored by intolerance and restrictive religious nationalism (Menchik, 2014; Pedersen, 2016), while new religious authorities in digital media often shift moderate voices

(Akmaliah, 2020). In this situation, the idea of religious moderation promoted by the state and Islamic universities (Nasir & Rijal, 2021) requires teachers who can bring it to life in the classroom, not just repeat slogans (Davids, 2017).

Multicultural education in Indonesian universities develops with a different approach. State universities tend to emphasize tolerance and inclusion through learning systems that are adaptive to socio-cultural diversity, while Islamic universities are more oriented towards the formation of moderate Islamic identity through courses such as Multicultural Education, Islam and Local Culture, and Social Ethics. The development of the Islamic studies curriculum is also influenced by the integration-interconnection epistemological approach, which views that when integration is not enough to bridge Islamic science and modern science, interconnection becomes the solution (Amin Abdullah, 2014). However, multicultural insights are not sufficiently built normatively; they must be internalized in student-centered curricula and pedagogical systems.

The Universitas Terbuka (UT) faces special challenges as well as opportunities in this regard. As a public university based on open and distance education with service units in each province, UT educates IRE students from very diverse social, cultural, and regional backgrounds. Many of them have been or will teach in their respective regions, whose community composition is different. However, students rarely experience direct encounters with students from other religions and ethnicities in their learning process. Research on the multicultural competence of prospective teachers is generally conducted outside the context of religious education (Choompunuch et al., 2024), while research on the integration curriculum of the Qur'an and science rarely touches on the issue of diversity (Asmaldi et al., 2022). As far as the author's search, there has been no study that explores the need for multicultural education for prospective IRE teachers in distance universities by departing from the voices of graduate school users. This gap is answered by this article. The international literature on teacher education also confirms this urgency. Systematic studies show that prospective teachers' beliefs about cultural diversity can be changed through planned training (Civitillo et al., 2018), and that the development of intercultural competencies is most effective when embedded in a real-world context, accompanied by guided reflection and practical opportunities (Romijn et al., 2021). Teachers' multicultural beliefs are related to their enthusiasm and self-efficacy in teaching diverse classrooms (Hachfeld et al., 2015), and learning opportunities during teacher education influence prospective teachers' beliefs about diversity (Paetsch et al., 2023). However, multicultural teacher education programs often only touch on cognitive aspects without addressing inequality (Gorski, 2009; Sleeter, 2001), and almost all of these studies take place outside the context of religious education. This research is an analysis stage in a series of development of an integrative-multicultural IRE curriculum model. The goal is to analyze the urgency and need for multicultural education for IRE UT students from the perspective of graduate user schools.

Multicultural education and teacher competence

Multicultural education is understood as the process of instilling a way of life that is respectful, sincere, and tolerant of cultural diversity in a pluralistic society, so that society is flexible in the face of social conflicts and national unity is not easily fractured (Mahfud, 2007). Nieto and Bode (2008) distinguish four levels of program objectives: tolerance, acceptance, respect, as well as affirmation, solidarity, and criticism. Many school programs stop at the tolerance level. Banks (2016) emphasizes the same thing: adding cultural content to the

curriculum is different from transforming the way students perceive knowledge and act on social issues.

The success of multicultural education is highly dependent on the pedagogical competence of educators. The literature recognizes several approaches that teachers can use, namely the human relations approach, single-group studies, multicultural transformation models, and anti-bias education (Choompunuch et al., 2024). In the transformative approach, students are brought together with cross-cultural experiences and resource persons from different backgrounds so that diversity is perceived as a strength, not a threat. Teachers are required to play the role of facilitators who encourage understanding, empathy, and the courage to dialogue with differences.

Historically, Banks (1993) mapped multicultural education into five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equality pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) and Gay (2002) then emphasized culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, i.e. learning that makes students' cultural backgrounds a source of learning. Nieto (2017) reminded that multicultural education must continue to be reimaged so that it does not stop at surface celebrations. Deardorff (2006) formulated intercultural competence as a combination of attitudes (appreciation, openness), knowledge and understanding, and skills that produce effective behavior and communication across cultures. The study of Civitillo et al. (2019) showed that self-reflection is the link between teachers' beliefs about diversity and culturally responsive teaching practices.

IRE with a multicultural perspective and religious moderation

Religious learning in schools is often caught between a dogmatic approach that risks giving birth to fanaticism and a social science approach that risks secularism. The third approach, namely the social planning approach, seeks to strengthen students' commitment to their religion while fostering an attitude of coexistence with followers of other religions (Kasinyo, 2012). This approach is rooted in the Islamic vision of *rahmatan li al-'alamin* with the principles of Islamic humanism, tolerance, democracy, and local cultural accommodation (Abidin & Murtadlo, 2020).

These principles can be broken down into relational values in Islamic ethics (Abidin, Fatawi, et al., 2025): *ta'aruf* (getting to know each other) through dialogue and cultural exposure; *ta'allum* (mutual learning) in cross-disciplinary and cultural learning; *ta'awun* (helping each other) through social activities; *tafahum* (mutual understanding) in resolving socio-cultural tensions; and *takaful* (bearing each other) in community-based collaborative projects. The preservation of religious expression and local wisdom is also a living source of learning for inclusive Islamic education, which Abidin, Puryanto, et al. (2025) refer to as an ethnopedagogic approach.

Empirical research in Indonesia shows that Islamic educational institutions have their own multicultural traditions. Islamic boarding schools in South Sulawesi, for example, build a multicultural attitude that is sourced from the Qur'an without having to adopt Western theories, and this attitude is reflected in the curriculum and daily interactions (Latif & Hafid, 2021). Raihani (2012) found promising multicultural educational practices in Islamic boarding schools, while Nilan (2009) highlights the distinctive spirit of pesantren education. The multiethnic community in the interior of West Kalimantan also shows how moderate Islam is socially constructed through cross-ethnic relations (Prasojo et al., 2019). Beyond Islamic

education, studies of Chinese Christian schools in Jakarta show that schools can be a space for the formation or even separation of religious, ethnic, and class identities (Hoon, 2011, 2014), and that young people's attitudes towards interfaith and ethnic associations still have boundaries that need to be bridged by education (Parker et al., 2014).

The discourse on the integration of knowledge was born from the criticism of the dichotomy of religious science and general science and the idea of Islamization of science (Al-Faruqi, 1987) and al-Attas' (1979) emphasis on *adab* both seeking a complete epistemology. Amin Abdullah (2014) offers an integration-interconnection paradigm that maintains interdisciplinary dialogue without fusing its methods. Integrated Islamic schools in Indonesia have translated this idea into learning practices (Asmaldi et al., 2022). This article departs from the view that the logic of interconnection can be extended to the realm of diversity: as revelation and science are dialogued, so too is one's own faith with the beliefs and cultures of others.

The practice of knowledge integration in Indonesia is very diverse. A comparative study in Madura Islamic boarding schools and Islamic schools in Selangor found that Madura Islamic boarding schools implement formal integration that is adoptive-adaptive, with some of the education subsystems still running separately (Hadi et al., 2024). At the university level, integration is realized, among other things, by opening study programs without religious and general science barriers so that education is inclusive (Hidayatullah et al., 2021). The diversity of this model shows that IRE teachers need to understand the integration of knowledge not as a recipe, but as the ability to adjust the approach to the institutional context.

Distance education and virtual classes as microlaboratories

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift of higher education to the digital space (Aristovnik et al., 2020) and demanded institutional readiness to face digital transformation (Giang et al., 2021). For distance universities such as UT, virtual classes open up the possibility of teaching practices (micro teaching) that bring together students from different provinces with real students at diverse partner schools. This model is in line with the trend of internationalization of higher education (de Wit & Altbach, 2021) and the need for digital and intercultural skills in the world of work (Fajaryati & Akhyar, 2020).

A literature review on teacher education during the pandemic found that effective online practices rely on social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Carrillo & Flores, 2020), a framework rooted in the inquiry community model (Garrison et al., 2000). Follow-up studies affirm the importance of social-collaborative dimensions, caring, and a more democratic and inclusive approach, while noting the challenges of student interaction and performance assessment (Carrillo & Flores, 2023). Experiences in Europe and Hong Kong show that the sudden shift to online is forcing teacher education institutions to reorganize field practices (Flores & Swennen, 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Moorhouse, 2020). Conceptually, strong teacher education demands a close connection between lectures and field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Zeichner, 2010) as well as representation, decomposition, and approximation exercises in teaching practices (Grossman et al., 2009). For UT, learning support for distance students is key to the success of open education (Zuhairi et al., 2019).

B. METHOD

This research is the first stage (Analyze) of the development research (Branch, 2009). This stage uses a qualitative approach to identify the needs of stakeholders, namely graduate user schools, IRE teachers, and students, as the basis for designing an integrative-multicultural IRE curriculum model. To strengthen the theoretical basis and compare the field findings with previous research evidence. The research location was chosen purposively because it represents the context of the school that Islamic Religious Education graduates at UT may enter, namely: SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda, Medan, North Sumatra. Schools with interfaith and ethnic students who implement multicultural education as the identity of the school. The informants consist of: school leaders, IRE teachers, teachers of Pancasila and Civil, and sociology subjects, and students.

Data were collected through three techniques. Semi-structured interviews explored the school's vision, learning practices, and expectations for IRE teachers' competencies. Observations were made on learning activities and school culture. Data were analyzed by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): transcription, initial coding, grouping of codes into themes, theme review, and theme naming. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources (leaders, teachers, students), triangulation of techniques (interviews, and observations,), and member checking of key informants.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The main finding of this study is that multicultural education that is systematically designed and implemented does not weaken the identity of the school, but instead becomes a source of excellence. This is most clearly seen at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan.

The implementation of multicultural education at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda has succeeded in making this school a superior school with a multicultural perspective. This school is known as a blended school model that facilitates the interaction of students from various cultural backgrounds and develops cross-group programs. This success can be seen in the following three aspects.

Multiculturalism as an institutional identity.

SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan is a school that makes multiculturalism not just a slogan, but an institutional identity that has been embedded since its establishment. This school is under the Sultan Iskandar Muda Education Foundation (YPSIM) which was founded on August 25, 1987 by dr. Sofyan Tan, who at that time wanted to build a school based on poverty alleviation with quality education. The basic idea is clear: the foundation exists as a medium to overcome social segregation, economic inequality, as well as discrimination of ethnicity, religion/belief, and race, with the belief that diversity should be appreciated as the wealth of the nation.

"Realizing human development that is faithful, empowered, cultured, diverse, and sustainable." As the vision of the Foundation and "Providing adequate facilities and developing the capacity of human resources in a sustainable manner" as the Foundation's mission.

This commitment is evident in the formulation of its vision and mission. The foundation's initial vision emphasizes the education of the intelligent, religious, and humanist young generation within the framework of equality and diversity, with a mission that explicitly targets strengthening cooperation and unity, eroding tribal prejudice and racial hatred, and fostering mutual respect between religious communities. The latest formulation on the foundation's official website maintains the same spirit through the values of "Diversity", which is described as love of the homeland, inclusiveness, and anti-discrimination. This vision is translated into two flagship programs, namely multicultural education and the chain cross-fostering program, which shows that the school views cultural diversity and economic justice as two sides of the same issue.

The vision does not stop on paper, but is embodied in daily policies and customs. Schools establish strict prohibitions against discriminatory treatment; for example, calling students of Tamil descent "keeling" is strictly forbidden and can be sanctioned. Interreligious dialogue is made a key principle, so it is not uncommon for an ustaz to give lectures to teachers of various religions, and vice versa. Physically, this multicultural identity is most strongly seen in houses of worship in school environments that are built to the same size and height, without anything larger or privileged. In learning, schools organize joint classes, where students of different religions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism) learn religion in one space with common material, such as about compassion. All of this confirms that multiculturalism in SIM is built through structure, symbols, and routines, not just through appeals.

This diversity is also reflected in the composition of the school community of SIM high school students consisting of 43% Muslims, 40% Christians, 15% Buddhists, and 2% Hindus. In terms of ethnicity, the composition includes 39% Batak, 22%, Chinese 14%, Tamil 6%, Mandailing 4%, Malay 3%, Karo 3%, Aceh 3%, Padang 2%, Nias 2%, and the remaining 2% Sundanese, Banten, Palembang, Ambon, and Pakistani 2%. This figure shows that no one group is truly dominant, so cross-identity interactions become a daily experience. The same diversity also applies to educators and staff; the researcher noted that starting from security guards, parking attendants, receptionists, teachers, to education staff have very diverse religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds, although quantitative data on teacher composition is not yet publicly available.

The views of the school leaders clarify the way of thinking behind this institutional identity. The principal emphasized that the root of social problems is not religious, ethnic, or racial differences, but socioeconomic inequality, so both must be addressed together through multicultural education and foster child programs. Regarding houses of worship, he explained that their existence is intended so that children are used to witnessing different ways of worship, which he concluded with the expression "We are different but we are one".

He also emphasized that the cultivation of national values must start from the teacher, because it is impossible for teachers to teach tolerance if they do not live it first. Recognition from the outside is evidenced by the existence of mosques, churches, monasteries, and temples in one location as an extraordinary symbol of diversity and tolerance.

Thus, multiculturalism at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda can be understood as a complete institutional identity: it is rooted in the history of the establishment,

formulated in vision and mission, carried out through anti-discrimination policies and shared learning practices, reflected in the heterogeneous composition of the school's citizens, and believed and voiced by its leaders. This school shows that diversity is not enough to be tolerated, but needs to be designed, cared for, and made into a shared culture.

Learning practices and school culture.

The practice of multiculturalism at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda (SIM) Medan is not only present in institutional documents, but is brought to life through daily learning and school culture. This process begins from the moment students first enter. Through the introduction period to the school environment, new students are introduced to the vision-mission, academic culture, and discipline, then the experience is continued in joint classes or diversity classes and extracurricular activities. The way of delivery is not rigid, because the school uses outbound methods and open discussions. This choice is important considering that new students come from different backgrounds, ranging from religious schools to public and private schools, so they need to be introduced to the school's vision from the first days.

In classrooms and school activities, interfaith and ethnic gatherings are consciously designed. And schools form multicultural discussion groups and arrange student seating alternately, provide activities that foster social awareness, and organize extracurricular activities such as sports clubs, academic clubs, and seminars. The researchers assessed that this school applies a whole school approach, which includes vision and policies, leadership, school culture, student activities, collaboration with the community, to curriculum and teaching. Togetherness is also symbolically celebrated through the provision of places of worship for each religion and the night of the celebration of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* to honor the holidays of all students.

The management of religious education is one of the most interesting aspects of this school. Basically, each student still receives religious lessons according to his beliefs. A religion teacher emphasized that doctrinal material is still taught to students of the same religion in an allocation of three hours of lessons. However, the school complements it with joint classes, which are held outside of formal religious lesson hours and gather Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, and Hindu students in one room. The material is agreed upon in advance by the religious teachers with one principle: find common ground and avoid contradictory topics so that the gap of differences does not deepen. The themes chosen include love, devotion to parents, and mutual help. In its implementation, each teacher explains the theme according to his or her religious perspective, then students are given the opportunity to ask questions. The activity is closed with prayers according to their respective religions; when Muslim students pray, only they pray while other students remain respectful, and vice versa.

This joint class is designed with clear boundaries. The goal is not to change beliefs, weaken obedience, or encourage students to change religions, but rather to provide knowledge about the teachings of other religions so that students can appreciate their friends when worshiping, socializing, and joking. A teacher explained the logic: by pointing out that the teachings of love are in the Qur'an, the Bible, Buddhism, and Hinduism, students are invited to realize that religion is essentially teaching goodness, and it is this awareness that can suppress racism. The atmosphere of the class is also made fun, opening with yelling, interspersed with humor, and closing

with a game of togetherness, so that students are always looking forward to the next class.

The school culture formed from these various practices is evident in the observation results. The researcher found warm communication between students and teachers as well as between teachers despite their different religions. He also noted a scene rarely encountered in other schools, namely non-Muslim students waiting for their friends to finish the dhuha prayer. Economic diversity can also be seen from parked vehicles, ranging from bicycles, motorcycles, cars, to pedicabs. The value of democracy is practiced concretely: the color of school paint is determined through student voting, and the color of minority choice still has a place on the pillars of the building. Thus, the multicultural culture in SIM High School was formed not by chance, but through a design that was deliberately built through classroom arrangement, creative management of religious education, shared rituals, and teacher examples, so that differences are experienced as a natural part of daily school life.

Discussion

Diversity as a source of excellence, not a threat

The success of SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda refutes the notion that multicultural education obscures group identity. The school shows that when diversity is managed intentionally, it becomes quality capital. These findings are in line with the view that transformative approaches make students view diversity as a strength (Choompunuch et al., 2024; Wang, 2022). Within the framework of Nieto and Bode (2008), practices in this school have gone beyond the level of tolerance towards respect and affirmation of what students do on research findings. For Islamic education, these findings confirm that the values of ta'aruf, ta'allum, ta'awun, tafahum, and takaful are not just normative discourses, but can be realized in a superior school culture. This success also supports the argument that education for tolerance should be carried out with a whole-of-school approach, including leadership, curriculum, culture, and relationships with the community (Raihani, 2011). Hoon (2013) asserts that schools are a microcosm of the state: successful multicultural citizenship education in schools has the potential to realize the motto of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika in real life. In the Indonesian context, Hoon (2017) also emphasizes that multiculturalism needs to explicitly include the religious dimension, because religion is the most decisive marker of identity in social relations.

From the findings obtained from SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda, it shows at least four reasons why multicultural education is urgent to be taught to IRE UT students. The first is: National reasons. Pluralistic Indonesia needs religious teachers who are a bridge of values, not a fortress of separation. IRE teachers are the spearhead of religious moderation in schools. The second is: The reason for user needs is that schools need IRE teachers who combine the integration of knowledge with sensitivity to differences, such as Sultan Iskandar Muda High School needs teachers who are ready to teach in cross-religious and ethnic classes. Third: Institutional reasons. UT is present in every province, so its graduates will teach in very diverse contexts, from Muslim-majority areas to areas with Muslims as a minority. A curriculum that equips multicultural insights will have a wide impact nationally. Fourth: Pedagogical reasons. Distance students rarely experience face-to-face encounters with students of different beliefs and cultures. In fact, multicultural empathy grows from direct experience, not just from reading (Cushner, 1993). These four reasons are reinforced by the finding that

prospective teachers generally feel less prepared to teach in diverse classrooms (Sleeter, 2001) and that teachers' multicultural beliefs are related to their professional quality in the classroom (Hachfeld et al., 2015). Without deliberate debriefing, IRE teachers risk repeating the gap between policies and practices noted by Raihani (2018).

Direction of the development of the integrative-multicultural IRE curriculum at UT

Based on these needs, the curriculum developed in the next stage is directed at three layers. First: The content layer combines the paradigm of integration-interconnection of the Qur'an and science (Amin Abdullah, 2014) with Islamic multicultural values (ta'aruf to takaful), and utilizes local wisdom as a source of learning in the spirit of ethnopedagogic (Abidin, Puryanto, et al., 2025). Second: The pedagogical layer uses a transformative, anti-bias, and student-centered approach, with discussion methods, role-playing, case studies, and reflection (Abidin & Murtadlo, 2020). Third: The delivery layer is in the form of a Moodle-based virtual class that functions as a micro laboratory. Through this class, IRE UT students from various provinces practice teaching students at partner schools online in virtual classes containing digital modules, interactive videos, quizzes, and discussion forums.

This delivery layer design is based on three principles from the literature. First, the development of the intercultural competence of prospective teachers must be embedded in a real context, with guided reflection and practical opportunities (Romijn et al., 2021; Civitillo et al., 2019). Second, virtual classrooms need to be designed to present social, cognitive, and teaching presence, rather than simply moving materials online (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Garrison et al., 2000). Third, micro labs serve as a third space that bridges lectures and schools (Zeichner, 2010), where students practice through practical approaches before fully immersing themselves in the classroom (Grossman et al., 2009). The intended competencies follow the framework of Deardorff (2006): an open and respectful attitude, knowledge of diversity, and intercultural communication and teaching skills, framed with culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002) and the value of religious moderation (Nasir & Rijal, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Multicultural education is urgently taught to IRE students at Universitas Terbuka. Analysis of the needs at SMA Sultan Iskandar Muda Medan and superior schools with an average heterogeneous composition of students and teachers from various ethnicities, religions, and socio-economic status, as well as the integration of multicultural curriculum and Diversity Classes that effectively eliminate social prejudices so that the learning environment remains harmonious without conflicts based on religious differences. Schools like this certainly require IRE teachers who have high multicultural sensitivity in addition to mastering good learning materials, proving that the urgency of developing a multicultural curriculum at Universitas Terbuka is a priority.

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