

## **Arabic Language Learning Through Multicultural Approach in Indonesia and Malaysia: (A Comparative Descriptive Analysis)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the implementation of Arabic language education through a multicultural approach in Indonesia and Malaysia. The urgency of this research lies in the lack of comparative studies on multicultural-based Arabic language education in Indonesia and Malaysia as the basis for curriculum development for pluralistic communities. It aims to compare teaching strategies, curriculum content, and the socio-cultural context that influence Arabic learning in both countries. As Arabic is not only a religious language but also a cultural bridge, its teaching can foster tolerance and respect for diversity. Using a qualitative-comparative method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis from Islamic educational institutions in both countries. The findings show that both nations share the goal of promoting inclusive values through Arabic education, though their approaches differ. Indonesia is moving toward contextual and participatory teaching, while Malaysia uses a structured system combining separation and integration models. Challenges include limited teacher training, varied student backgrounds, and lack of culturally responsive materials. Despite this, Arabic education has proven effective in shaping students' awareness of multicultural values when designed inclusively. This research provides insights for educators and policymakers to enhance Arabic curricula as a medium for building intercultural understanding and social harmony.

**Keywords:** *Arabic Language Education, Multicultural Approach, Comparative Study, Indonesia Malaysia, Islamic Education*

### **ABSTRAK**

Studi ini mengkaji implementasi pendidikan bahasa Arab melalui pendekatan multikultural di Indonesia dan Malaysia. Urgensi penelitian ini terletak pada kurangnya kajian komparatif tentang Pendidikan bahasa Arab berbasis multikultural di Indonesia dan Malaysia sebagai dasar pengembangan kurikulum masyarakat majemuk. Tujuannya adalah membandingkan strategi pengajaran, isi kurikulum, dan konteks sosial budaya yang memengaruhi pembelajaran bahasa Arab di kedua negara. Karena bahasa Arab bukan hanya bahasa agama tetapi juga jembatan budaya, pengajarannya dapat menumbuhkan toleransi dan rasa hormat terhadap keberagaman. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif-komparatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan analisis dokumen dari lembaga pendidikan Islam di kedua negara. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kedua negara memiliki tujuan yang sama untuk mempromosikan nilai-nilai inklusif melalui pendidikan bahasa Arab, meskipun pendekatan mereka berbeda. Indonesia bergerak menuju pengajaran kontekstual dan partisipatif, sementara Malaysia menggunakan sistem terstruktur yang menggabungkan model pemisahan dan integrasi. Tantangannya meliputi pelatihan guru yang terbatas, latar belakang siswa yang beragam, dan kurangnya materi yang responsif terhadap budaya. Meskipun demikian, pendidikan

bahasa Arab telah terbukti efektif dalam membentuk kesadaran siswa akan nilai-nilai multikultural ketika dirancang secara inklusif. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan bagi para pendidik dan pembuat kebijakan untuk meningkatkan kurikulum bahasa Arab sebagai media untuk membangun pemahaman antarbudaya dan harmoni sosial.

**Kata kunci :** *Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, Pendekatan Multikultural, Studi Banding, Indonesia Malaysia, Pendidikan Islam*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The rapid flow of globalization increases the intensity of intercultural interactions and demands a deeper cross-cultural understanding (Azhar et al., 2023). In this context, education plays a central role as a strategic means to foster mutual respect and strengthen tolerance values between individuals and groups (Sa'dudin & Safitri, 2020).

This phenomenon is especially strong in the Southeast Asian region, which is known as an area with cultural, linguistic and religious diversity (Wulansari, 2020). Indonesia and Malaysia, two multicultural countries in this region, have significant Muslim communities and face challenges in managing social, political, and educational diversity (Santoso et al., 2023).

Indonesia is the country with the most ethnic groups, religions, and cultures in the world. With 13,000 islands, six official religions, and various belief systems, Indonesia is one of the largest multicultural nations. This diversity is both a potential and a challenge that requires efforts to maintain unity within the framework of national goals, namely towards a just, prosperous, and welfare society (Khoiriyah, 2019).

Likewise, Malaysia is characterized by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. This results in various policies including education. Education becomes an object in developing tolerance among students. The program includes teaching the value of tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation and justice. The purpose of these academic aspects can produce human beings who are not only good at academics, but also social skills in society. These characters are able to appreciate diversity and social harmony. The challenges of academic aspects have a big share in the realm of other fields, such as social, political, and economic in the context of the state (Amaliati et al., n.d.).

In a multicultural and multireligious society, education is not merely a process of knowledge transfer but also a vehicle for fostering inclusive and harmonious character development, enabling students to grow into individuals who take pride in their culture,

language, and other distinctive traits (Sumarsih et al., 2022). Multicultural education encompasses issues of social justice, democracy, and human rights that are closely related to political, social, moral, religious, and cultural issues (Hani, 2020). Schools, as centers of interaction, are strategic places for instilling values of solidarity, tolerance, and embracing diversity (Putri & Maunah, 2023).

The conditions of a multicultural and multireligious society, education is not just a process of transferring knowledge, but also a vehicle for inclusive and harmonious character building. In addition, multicultural in the concept of education is able to give birth to students to develop into individuals who are proud of their culture, language and other characteristics (Sumarsih et al., 2022). The multicultural concept that fosters respect for diversity and harmony of life side by side so as to foster a parallel life side by side (Khoiriyah, 2019).

Society and education are closely related in a country, throughout their lives each person carries out education (Suradi, n.d.). Education is the main door to develop people's potential in religion, self-control, morals, and skills needed by a person in society, nation and state. Education is the center of interaction of educators and students interacting in order to achieve an educational goal. These interactions can often occur in schools, homes, and communities as an environment that students encounter, either directly or not in the learning process. Of course, school is the main thing that instills the value of solidarity, tolerance, and is able to embrace all diversity (Putri & Maunah, 2023).

Multiculturalism in the field of education is still a cross-border discourse, meaning that it is still a broad concept that is being debated. This concept can refer to various issues in life, particularly in the field of education (M. Yusuf & Rahmawati, 2020). Multicultural education encompasses issues of social justice, democracy, and human rights, which may be related to political, social, cultural, moral, religious, and educational issues. This study can facilitate the understanding of multicultural education

One important element that is often overlooked in shaping multicultural awareness is the Arabic (L et al., 2024). Arabic not only serves as a means of communication or access to Islamic texts, but also as a bridge to understanding the diverse Arab culture and the universal values it contains. Such values include justice,

peace, and respect for differences (Huda et al., n.d.). With the right teaching approach, learning Arabic can be an effective medium in instilling an attitude of tolerance and developing national and humanitarian insights amidst the plurality of society.

In the context of strengthening Arabic language education through a multicultural approach, comparative studies between Indonesia and Malaysia are very relevant and urgent. This comparison is important to examine the pedagogy, content, and socio-political context that influence the implementation of Arabic language learning in the two countries.

The main issue to be raised in this research is how Arabic language education in the madrasa curriculum in Indonesia and Malaysia plays a role using a multicultural approach. This research will identify pedagogical strategies, material content, and socio-political contexts that influence the implementation of Arabic language learning in the two countries.

Based on that, the problem in this research can be formulated as follows: how is the implementation of multicultural-based Arabic language education in Indonesia and Malaysia, what are challenges and successes in the Arabic language learning process through a multicultural approach, how does Arabic language education play a real role in shaping students' tolerant attitudes, as well as what are the similarities and differences found in the comparative description analysis between the two countries.

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare Arabic language education approaches through multicultural approaches in Indonesia and Malaysia and identify best practices that can be adopted to improve the quality of Arabic language education as a means of strengthening multiculturalism. The contribution of this research is expected to provide academic and practical insights for curriculum developers, educators, and policy makers in designing educational strategies that are more inclusive and responsive to social diversity, especially through the teaching of Arabic in madrasah or other Islamic educational institutions.

This research is based on the theoretical framework of multicultural education that emphasizes the importance of recognizing diversity as a foundation in the educational process (Yusuf, n.d.). According to James A. Banks, multicultural education

is not only about cultural representation in the curriculum, but also about restructuring the total learning experience so that learners are able to think critically, appreciate differences, and play an active role in an inclusive society. This kind of education places learners from different cultural backgrounds on an equal footing and allows them to learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect (Banks & Banks, 2020).

In line with this, the concept of multiculturalism in education is understood as the process of absorbing values such as mutual respect, respecting the beliefs of others, and avoiding violence when facing differences. Education that focuses on multiculturalism not only provides knowledge, but also shapes an open and caring personality. In this case, educational institutions, especially madrasah, become an important place to develop social awareness and intercultural communication skills (Riyanti & Novitasari, 2021).

Arabic language learning, in this context, has great potential to instill values of tolerance towards diversity. Arabic is not only used to understand religious texts, but also as a way to access the varied and historical richness of Arab culture. Through relevant and reflective learning methods, teachers can introduce common Islamic values such as rahmah (compassion), 'adl (justice), and ta'ayush (peaceful coexistence), which are in line with the principles of tolerance and diversity. Therefore, Arabic learning should not stand alone as a language lesson, but be integrated in efforts to shape multicultural character (Aziz et al., 2024).

Researchers explored previous studies related to similar research such as a study entitled "Systematic Literature Review: Dimensions of Multicultural Education in Indonesia and Malaysia" which concluded that the two countries have differences and similarities in learning models. Indonesia uses educational integration in all subjects while Malaysia uses two models. Namely, separate and integrated models (Amaliati et al., n.d.).

The article in 2024 entitled "Curriculum Bridges: Inclusion and Arabic Language Learning in a Multicultural Context" written by Aziz in 2024. The results of this study state that the need for an adaptive and responsive learning approach to the needs of students by considering the multicultural context of the learners, especially in the realm of education (Aziz et al., 2024).

Furthermore, there is an article by Tiara Sevi Nuramlita and friends entitled "Multicultural Education in Strengthening the National Identity of Students Abroad: Perspectives of Indonesian School Teachers and Students in Malaysia and Singapore". The essence of the article mentions that the three countries have specificities to the educational and cultural needs of Indonesian students abroad (Nurmanita et al., n.d.).

Research by Mahmud (2018) in Indonesia shows that strengthening the curriculum based on Islamic moderation values can encourage the birth of a generation that is more open to differences. However, there are not many studies that comparatively discuss in depth how Arabic language learning can be an instrument for instilling tolerance values in these two countries with different sociopolitical backgrounds.

The research gap lies in the lack of comparative analysis that focuses on multicultural Arabic learning practices in Indonesia and Malaysia simultaneously. This research tries to fill the gap by contributing to the development of Arabic language learning models that are not only oriented towards language competence, but also towards building multicultural awareness among students in the two countries.

## **METHOD**

The researcher used a comparative qualitative approach. Qualitative research is used based on post-positivism by researchers on an object (Darmawan, D. 2013.). A qualitative approach was chosen in this study to comprehensively explore the process, meaning, and socio-cultural background behind the implementation of multicultural-based Arabic language education in Indonesia and Malaysia, which cannot be explained only with numerical data.

Qualitative-comparative to investigate and compare in depth the practice of teaching Arabic through a multicultural approach in Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. This approach is used because it can capture complex social realities, especially in the context of education in diverse societies (Pahleviannur et al., n.d.)

The research subjects include Arabic language teachers, university students, and students who are directly involved in the learning process. Respondents from Malaysia consisted of educators, lecturers, and teachers who teach in various educational

institutions such as Community Learning Center and International Islamic University Malaysia. Meanwhile, respondents from Indonesia include students, lecturers, and educational practitioners from various institutional backgrounds, such as Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Muhammadiyah Surakarta University, Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta University, as well as several teachers from SMAIT Abu Bakar and other excellent high schools. The research location will focus on Islamic education institutions in both countries, namely madrasah in Indonesia and Islamic schools in Malaysia, each of which has unique social conditions and educational policies.

Data collection was conducted through several main techniques, namely online interviews in the form of semi-structured questionnaires, which allow respondents to express their experiences. Non-participant observation, either in person or online of learning activities in Indonesia and Malaysia, as well as document analysis in the form of articles, textbooks, and other sources. Interviews aimed to explore the views and experiences of teachers and students on the role of teaching Arabic through a multicultural approach. Observation is used to understand the dynamics of the teaching-learning process directly. Meanwhile, the study of documentation studies help strengthen the findings by examining teaching materials and other educational documents (Zakiyah & Huda, 2020).

The data collected will be analyzed using a thematic approach, namely through several stages: transcription and reading of data, coding, grouping of codes into categories, identification of patterns and main themes, and drawing meaning and interpretation according to the research focus. Findings from each country are first analyzed separately, then compared to reveal differences and similarities in Arabic language education practices and their role through a multicultural approach (Ali et al., 2022). To maintain data validity, triangulation techniques are used in terms of sources, methods, and time. In addition, the researcher will also conduct member checking by re-engaging the informants to ensure that the interpretation of the data is in line with their original experiences and views (Pahleviannur et al., n.d.).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Arabic language education plays a significant role in shaping students' tolerant attitudes, especially through approaches that touch on the affective aspects of learning. In

practice, learning Arabic not only introduces students to the structure of the language, but also to the values contained in Islamic texts, such as verses of the Qur'an and hadith that emphasize the principles of compassion, respect for differences, and brotherhood between human beings. In some educational institutions, Arabic learning also functions as a bridge to erode regional barriers, because it is used as a language of communication across student backgrounds. Tolerant attitudes arise when students are accustomed to discussing, working together, and helping each other without distinguishing cultural origins. In other words, Arabic education contributes to the formation of an inclusive character, because it encourages students to think across perspectives, avoid stereotypes, and appreciate cultural diversity as part of God's will.

In this context, Arabic education does not only aim to teach linguistic and religious aspects, but also seeks to foster awareness of the importance of respecting differences. This can be seen in learning practices that insert elements of local culture through contextualized materials, such as texts containing regional traditions, the use of various regional languages in the translation of Arabic vocabulary, and the involvement of students in cultural activities such as Islamic festivals that reflect the richness of Indonesian traditions. Teachers also play a strategic role by adjusting teaching methods to students' characters and cultural backgrounds, as well as creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere, so that differences are used as a source of strength in the Arabic language learning process.

## **Findings in Indonesia**

The article by Siti Amaliati describes the education model in Indonesia implementing two learning models, namely formal and non-formal. Formal education is education that has received legality from the government, while non-formal education is organized by private institutions or community initiatives for certain purposes. Formal education starts from Early Childhood Education (PAUD), Elementary School (SD), Junior High School (SMP), Senior High School (SMA) to Higher Education (PT). Aspects of education in it teach an understanding of the diversity of religions, races, cultures, languages, and other aspects. The role of formal education is to create successors who understand and appreciate the diversity of society, creating a peaceful

and inclusive society. Meanwhile, non-formal education includes pesantren, training institutions, community-based education, community education or others. Aims for group goals such as improving skills, knowledge or awareness of people in a community environment (Amaliati et al., n.d.).

Although Arabic language education in Indonesia has shown a commitment to multicultural values, the crisis of acceptance of cultural differences still occasionally appears in practice. Some schools or madrasahs still run a homogeneous and textual learning model, without linking it to the students' social context. As a result, an overly normative approach can close the space for cultural dialogue in Arabic language learning. In addition, challenges such as teachers' low cultural literacy, resource inequality, and lack of multicultural-based professional development training cause a subtle crisis in Arabic language education. Compared to the ideal inclusive approach, there is still a gap between the concept and implementation in the field. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate the curriculum and strengthen the capacity of teachers in order to be able to make Arabic language education as a medium for actualizing multicultural values more real and equitable in all educational units in Indonesia.

## Finding in Malaysia

The questionnaire results show that Malaysia's multicultural approach in Arabic language education is reflected in the use of a more communicative and integrative curriculum. Teachers there tend to create a learning environment that welcomes differences, even through cultural introduction sessions at the beginning of the school year. This difference can be understood through the perspective of constructivism theory, which emphasizes and active involvement of learners. The communicative approach in Malaysia is more in line with constructivism as it allows students to construct language understanding through cross-cultural communicative practices. Although there are differences in focus, both Indonesia and Malaysia have the same spirit building cross-cultural understanding.

Article data from international journals based on the researcher's observation in Malaysia, multicultural education is mostly implemented through the nationality education system that covers formal levels from pre-school to university. This system

aims to create a learning environment that encourages understanding of ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity in the spirit of nationhood. The approaches used are divided into two, namely the separation and integration models. The separation model places multicultural education as a separate discipline that is strengthened through teacher training. However, training alone is not enough to ensure increased understanding without direct experience in a diverse classroom (Mohamad, 2009).

In contrast, the integration model incorporates multicultural values into the curriculum, teaching, and teacher competencies by involving families and utilizing various learning media, thus creating a learning experience that is integrated with everyday life. Multicultural education in Malaysia is implemented through formal institutions with complementary separation and integration approaches (Zaini et al., n.d.). Both approaches are directed at forming a generation that is able to understand, appreciate and live harmoniously in diversity. In line with Indonesia, Malaysia emphasizes the importance of multicultural education from an early age to create an inclusive and tolerant society (Amaliati et al., n.d.).

On the other hand, Malaysia shows a more systematic tendency in implementing multicultural education through a curriculum structure that emphasizes Arabic communication skills and strengthens the value of tolerance (Azman, n.d.). Teachers in Malaysia, based on the interview results, appear to be more intensive in conducting interactive learning activities such as introducing students' culture at the beginning of the year, utilizing audiovisual media, and communicative approaches based on the context of students' lives.

## **Comparison of findings from the two countries**

When compared, the role of Arabic language education through a multicultural approach in Indonesia and Malaysia shows similarities in vision but differences in implementation strategies. In Indonesia, Arabic education tends to be directed at strengthening religious understanding and Arabic grammar, but in some educational institutions, a multicultural approach has begun to be applied which emphasizes the integration of students' local cultural values. Teachers in Indonesia generally use cultural

comparison-based learning, such as comparing Arabic and local customs in the context of greetings, clothing, or the value of manners.

Both countries view Arabic education not only as foreign language teaching, but also as a vehicle to instill the value of togetherness in diversity. This analysis shows that despite different approaches and emphasis, both Indonesia and Malaysia have utilized Arabic language education as a means of strengthening multicultural identity, although they still face challenges that require policy support and continuous teacher training.

The implementation of multicultural-based Arabic language education in Indonesia and Malaysia shows an inclusive and responsive approach to students' cultural diversity. Based on the results of interviews, educational institutions in both countries realize the importance of adjusting the learning process to the cultural background of students. Based on the interview results in Indonesia, Arabic language education is not only focused on mastering grammar and understanding religious texts, but also directed to form tolerant characters through contextual and interactive learning. Teachers encourage students to share their cultural experiences, get to know Arabic culture through comparison with local culture, and instill cross-cultural values of courtesy and respect.

## **Challenges and strategies for learning Arabic from both countries**

The results of the author's analysis of the challenges in internalizing the value of tolerance in Indonesia show that the process of internalizing the value of tolerance in Arabic language learning in Indonesia is faced with a number of challenges. One of them is the difference in the initial abilities of students who come from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds. Some students have difficulty understanding the cultural meanings inherent in Arabic, especially when the terms or expressions used do not have direct equivalents in local culture. In addition, the disparity of learning facilities in different regions also affects the effectiveness of teaching multiculturalism values. However, in the midst of these obstacles, there are positive achievements. Teachers are able to build a learning environment that encourages interaction between students across cultural backgrounds, manage misunderstandings through a communicative approach, and instill

a tolerant attitude by making cultural differences a reflective topic in the learning process. Support in the form of a contextual approach, selection of adaptive materials, and strengthening character through projects or group work are indicators of the success of internalizing the value of tolerance through Arabic language education.

In an effort to internalize multicultural values in Arabic language education, there are a number of challenges faced by educational institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. One of the main challenges is the differences in students' cultural backgrounds and mother tongues which can affect their understanding of the meaning and context of Arabic. Teachers have to deal with a diversity of dialects, ways of thinking, and different social values, which sometimes lead to misunderstandings in communication (Damit et al., 2016). In addition, limited learning media, lack of teachers trained in intercultural approaches, and low student motivation are also serious obstacles. However, there are also significant successes that show that multicultural values can be internalized effectively. Teachers succeeded in creating inclusive and collaborative learning spaces where students could share cultural stories, make intercultural comparisons and understand universal values in Arabic communication. Learning projects that address differences in traditions, the use of contextualized materials, and the integration of the value of manners in Arabic are strategies that successfully strengthen students' understanding of the importance of respecting differences. This success indicates that when Arabic language learning is designed with a multicultural approach, it is not only a means to master the language, but also a tool to build intercultural awareness and strengthen relationships between students from diverse backgrounds.

Arabic language education through a multicultural approach plays a real role in shaping the character of students who are tolerant, open and respectful of diversity. This approach not only introduces language as a means of communication, but also as a window to understand the values, norms and traditions of Arab society and compare them with students' local culture. In practice, teachers encourage students to understand the importance of language ethics, such as the use of polite expressions and respect for interlocutors, which are full of Arabic cultural values. In addition, students are invited to explore various aspects of Arab life such as greetings, food, clothing, and celebrations and reflect on them through discussions and class activities that compare with their own



culture. This encourages the formation of mutual respect and broadens students' intercultural horizons. This process shows that Arabic language education can be an effective tool in shaping cross-cultural understanding, reducing stereotypes, and fostering social solidarity in the midst of differences. Thus, the multicultural approach in Arabic language learning clearly contributes to the formation of a more harmonious and inclusive society.

## CONCLUSION

The implementation of multicultural-based Arabic education in Indonesia and Malaysia shows a similar vision in forming a tolerant and inclusive generation, although the strategies used are different. Indonesia has begun to implement a contextual and participatory approach that pays attention to the cultural diversity of students, while Malaysia implements a more systematic model through the formal education system with a separation and integration approach. Both show that learning Arabic is not only a means of mastering language and religious texts, but also a medium to instill social and cultural values, such as mutual respect and understanding differences. Challenges such as limited trained teachers, less contextualized learning media, and students' diverse cultural backgrounds are still obstacles that need to be overcome.

These findings confirm that Arabic language education has strong potential to support students' multicultural character building if it is designed with an inclusive approach. Therefore, curriculum development needs to explicitly integrate multicultural values in learning materials, methods and media. Teachers need to be given intercultural training, and educational practices need to involve parents and utilize students' life experiences as learning resources. Thus, learning Arabic can develop not only linguistic proficiency but also openness, tolerance, and readiness for life in a culturally diverse society.

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