MULTICULTURALISM AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN WESTERN CONTEXTS: NAVIGATING IDENTIITY, FAITH, AND CITIZENSHIP

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Islamic education in multicultural societies in Western contexts, focusing on identity dynamics, civic values, and the structural challenges faced by Muslim communities. The main objective is to examine how Islamic education contributes to the negotiation of dual identities religious and civic and its role in strengthening social cohesion within pluralistic societies. The research was conducted between March and May 2025, employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a qualitative-exploratory approach. It analyzed secondary literature published between 2020 and 2025, retrieved from reputable databases such as Scopus, Sinta, and Google Scholar. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify conceptual patterns and empirical findings. The results indicate that Islamic education serves as a space for negotiating dual identities, integrates civic values into curricula, and underscores the strategic role of Muslim educators as cultural mediators and transformative agents. Nevertheless, Islamic education also encounters structural and social challenges, including discrimination, strict secular regulations, and Islamophobia. This study contributes to the discourse on multicultural and Islamic education by offering a novel perspective on religious education as a transformative force in pluralistic societies, while providing practical recommendations for more inclusive educational policies and practices.

Keywords: *Islamic Education; Multiculturalism; Dual Identity; Citizenship; Western Contexts.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran pendidikan Islam dalam konteks masyarakat multikultural di negara-negara Barat dengan fokus pada dinamika identitas, nilai kewargaan, dan tantangan sosial yang dihadapi. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk memahami bagaimana pendidikan Islam berkontribusi dalam membentuk identitas ganda Muslim sebagai pemeluk agama dan sekaligus warga negara serta peranannya

dalam memperkuat kohesi sosial di tengah pluralisme. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan pada Maret-Mei 2025 dengan menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dan pendekatan kualitatif eksploratif melalui analisis literatur sekunder yang diterbitkan pada periode 2020-2025, bersumber dari basis data bereputasi seperti Scopus, Sinta, dan Google Scholar. Analisis data dilakukan dengan teknik analisis tematik (Braun & Clarke, 2006) untuk mengidentifikasi pola konseptual dan temuan empiris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan Islam berfungsi sebagai ruang negosiasi identitas ganda, mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai kewargaan ke dalam kurikulum, serta memperlihatkan peran strategis pendidik Muslim dalam membangun dialog antarbudaya. Namun demikian, pendidikan Islam juga menghadapi tantangan struktural dan sosial berupa diskriminasi, regulasi sekuler yang ketat, dan islamofobia. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teori pendidikan multikultural dan Islam dengan menawarkan perspektif baru tentang pendidikan agama sebagai agen transformatif dalam masyarakat pluralistik, sekaligus memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi kebijakan dan praktik pendidikan yang lebih inklusif.

Kata kunci: *Pendidikan Islam; Multikulturalisme; Identitas Ganda; Kewargaan; Negara Barat.*

A. Introduction

The increasing visibility and demographic growth of Muslim communities in Western countries has drawn academic attention to the complexities of integrating Islamic values within secular and pluralistic educational frameworks (Sahin, 2018; DeCuir, 2025). In multicultural societies such as the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia, Islamic education has become a focal point in debates concerning citizenship, identity, and social cohesion (Safdar et al., 2023). Within this dynamic context, a fundamental question arises: How can Islamic educational institutions in Western settings preserve religious identity while simultaneously promoting civic participation and a sense of national belonging.

Theoretically, multiculturalism upholds the recognition of cultural and religious diversity within the framework of shared citizenship (Hossain, 2024; Shaw, 2023). However, in practice, this approach is often criticized for its ambivalence toward religious minorities, particularly Muslims, who are frequently perceived through the lens of security, essentialist stereotypes, or dismissive attitudes (Mansouri & Modood, 2021). Social realities reveal a persistent gap: despite Western nations' claims to uphold the values of pluralism, Muslim communities often face Islamophobia, exclusion from curriculum narratives, and regulations that restrict religious expression (ElBahlawan & Mohamed, 2025).

Within this context, Islamic education is frequently marginalized or misrepresented as being in conflict with Western democratic values

Various studies have highlighted the role of Islamic schools in shaping moral and spiritual development (Islamic, et al., 2024), sustaining cultural continuity (Allen, et al., 2022), as well as the tensions between religious and national identities (Shady, 2022). (Pace, 2021) examined how religious education in Europe faces challenges in representing minorities, while (Saada, 2023) explored progressive Islamic approaches in civic education. Although these studies provide significant contributions, most remain institutional or normative in nature, with limitations in exploring educators' direct experiences and pedagogical strategies for bridging religious and civic identities. Furthermore, comparative studies across Western countries are still limited and often disconnected from policy debates and curriculum reforms that could benefit from a Muslim perspective.

This study is driven by a crucial question: How do Islamic educators in Western contexts understand and practice the integration of religious identity, civic education, and multiculturalism? The aim of this research is to explore how Islamic education can serve as a space for negotiating identity, faith-based empowerment, and civic participation within secular and pluralistic democratic societies.

In Western countries, Islamic education is far from being merely a tool for cultural preservation; rather, it constitutes an important space for fostering pluralistic identities and civic awareness among young Muslims. Through intercultural dialogue, reinterpretation of Islamic principles in contemporary contexts, and inclusive pedagogical approaches, Muslim educators actively contribute to strengthening multicultural and democratic civic values.

The novelty of this study lies in its contextual approach and focus on the role of educators, combining theories of multiculturalism, Islamic pedagogy, and civic education in a dialogical manner. Unlike previous studies, which tended to position Islamic education as a static entity or as antagonistic to Western values, this research highlights the transformative potential of Islamic education in shaping inclusive dual identities. The study contributes to multicultural education theory through the integration of religious epistemology into civic discourse, enriches Islamic education scholarship with authentic narratives from Muslim educators, and offers policy implications for curriculum development that respects religious diversity while fostering shared national values. Through a cross-national approach and comparative analysis, this study addresses both theoretical and empirical gaps, while providing practical solutions to the challenges of education in contemporary multicultural societies.

B. Research Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to analyze and synthesize academic findings concerning the relationship between multiculturalism and Islamic education in Western countries. The research is qualitative and exploratory, focusing on a critical analysis of published scholarly documents, including journal articles, academic books, and research reports from reputable sources. The study was conducted from March to May 2025. The entire process of literature collection, selection, and analysis was carried out online through international and national academic databases, such as Scopus, Sinta, and Google Scholar.

The data for this study were drawn from secondary literature with the following inclusion criteria: (1) articles focusing on Islamic education, multiculturalism, Muslim identity, and civic education; (2) research conducted in Europe, America, and Australia; (3) publications from the period 2020–2025; and (4) sourced from reputable journals or publishers. Data collection was performed through systematic documentation using Boolean operator search techniques (AND, OR, NOT) to select publications according to the criteria. Eligible articles were recorded, classified, and grouped based on year of publication, geographic region, methodological approach, and main research themes.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), comprising several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through in-depth reading; (2) initial coding to identify key findings; (3) identification of recurring themes related to the relationship between Islamic education and multiculturalism; (4) grouping themes into conceptual categories; and (5) interpretation by connecting these themes to the theoretical frameworks of multiculturalism and Islamic education.

The limitations of this study lie in its reliance solely on secondary literature without empirical verification through interviews or direct observation, making the findings largely conceptual. Additionally, the study's scope was limited to Western countries with English-language publications, which may not fully represent the experiences of Muslim communities in other regions. For future research, it is recommended to: (1) conduct field studies with in-depth interviews of educators, students, and policymakers in Western Islamic schools; (2) perform cross-regional comparative studies to examine the adaptation of Islamic education in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa; and (3) employ quantitative approaches to measure the impact of Islamic education on the formation of multicultural identities more objectively.

Table 1. Summary of Literature

No.	Focus of Findings	Author/Year	Context/Country	Key Findings Summary
1.	Negotiation of Dual Identity	Tuna (2024); Jones-Ahmed (2022)	UK, US & Europe	Islamic education serves as a space for negotiating hybrid identities (both Muslim and citizen).
2.	Integration of Civic Values	Ozalp & Ćufurović (2021); Whyte (2022); Aderibigbe et al. (2023); Cipollone et al. (2022)	Australia, Europe, UK	Islamic education integrates values of democracy, justice, ta'awun, and amanah into the curriculum.
3.	Role of Muslim Teachers as Mediators	Fauzi & Sabila (2022); Markey et al. (2021); Zaidi & Perry (2025); Sulé et al. (2023)	Indonesia, Canada, Global	Muslim teachers act as facilitators of intercultural dialogue, comparative ethics educators, and agents of social transformation.
4.	Structural & Social Challenges	Gawo & Tafesse (2024); Alam & Mohanty (2023); Omoigberale et al. (2025); Malazonia et al. (2023)	Europe, Global	Barriers include Islamophobia, restrictive policies, marginalization; solutions involve inclusive policies and institutional support.

C. Results and Discussion
Results
Islamic Education as a Space for Negotiating Dual Identity

Findings from the literature indicate that Islamic education in Western countries plays a central role in the formation and negotiation of dual identities among Muslim students. Islamic schools provide a relatively safe space for maintaining students' religious identities while also accommodating the process of adapting to the values and norms of the majority society. In environments often marked by stigma and discrimination against Muslims, Islamic educational institutions enable students to explore their sense of self without facing pressure for full assimilation.
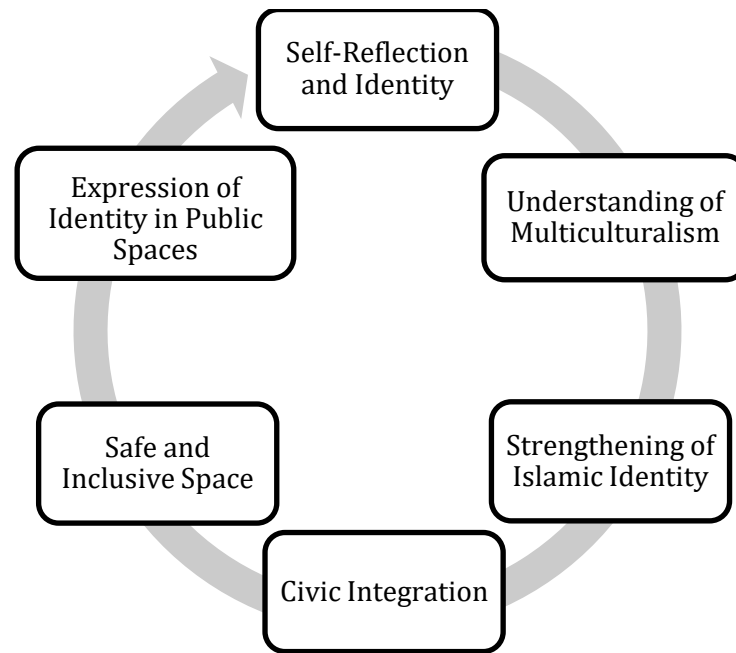
Figure 1. The Process of Dual Identity Formation in Islamic Education

Several studies also indicate that Muslim students attending Islamic education tend to exhibit higher confidence in expressing their religious identity in public spaces. They not only learn Islamic teachings in a normative manner but are also encouraged to reflect on their position as members of a multicultural society. This process strengthens their identity as both Muslims and citizens, particularly in contexts where religious identity is often perceived as separate from or even in conflict with civic identity.

Integration of Civic Values in the Curriculum

The studies reviewed indicate that several Islamic educational institutions actively integrate civic values into their curricula. Values such as justice, tolerance, cooperation, social responsibility, and respect for local laws are introduced as part of Islamic teachings relevant to civic life. This integration is often carried out contextually, either through combining religious lessons with social themes or through extracurricular activities that encourage students' engagement within the community.
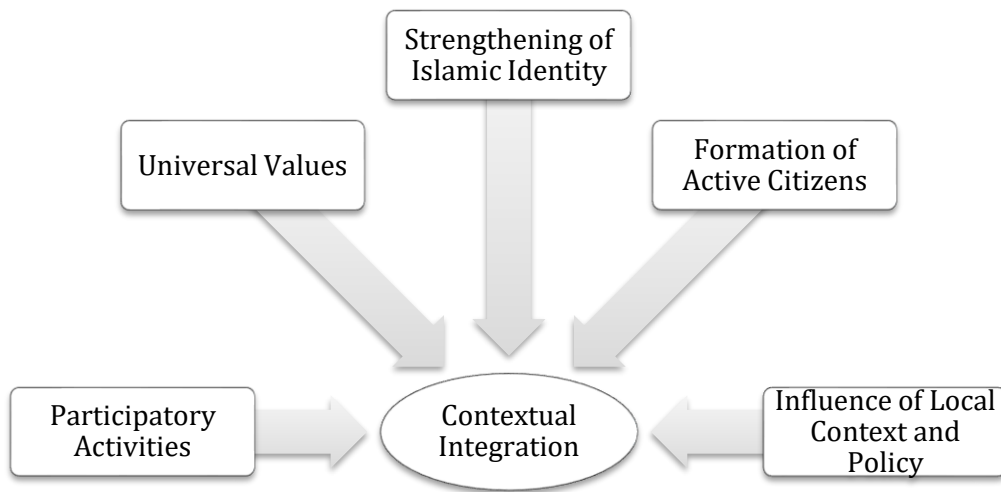
Figure 2. The Process of Civic Value Integration in the Islamic Curriculum

The curricula developed by Islamic schools in Western countries aim not only to strengthen students' Islamic identity but also to encourage them to become active and productive citizens. In some countries, such as the UK and Australia, this approach has been supported by national curriculum guidelines that recognize the existence of faith-based schools. Nevertheless, the form and depth of civic value integration still vary greatly depending on the local context and the ideological orientation of each educational institution.

Strategic Role of Muslim Educators

Muslim educators in Islamic schools play a crucial role as agents bridging religious traditions with the social and political realities of the countries in which they reside. They are responsible not only for teaching religious content but also for guiding students in developing character and attitudes toward the broader society. Several studies have found that Muslim teachers consciously develop pedagogical strategies that allow students to engage with the values of the majority society without compromising their religious integrity.
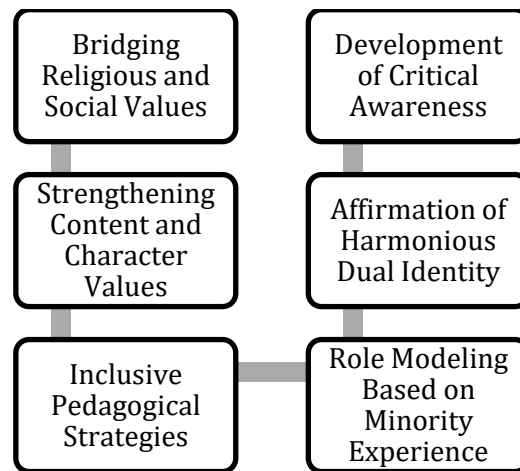
Figure 3. The Strategic Role Cycle of Muslim Educators

In addition, Muslim educators play a significant role in teaching students to critically navigate identity and social challenges. They convey that being both Muslim and a Western citizen is not contradictory; rather, it can serve as a strength for building intercultural bridges. In this process, educators often draw on their personal experiences as minorities to provide concrete examples for students on how to participate in a pluralistic society in a constructive and dignified manner.

Structural and Social Challenges

Although many best practices have been observed in Islamic education in the West, significant structural challenges remain. Institutional discrimination against Islamic schools, strict curriculum regulations, and negative perceptions of Islam from the media and parts of society are realities that many Islamic educational institutions must confront. In some countries, highly strict secular policies limit the autonomy of faith-based institutions in developing their curricula independently.
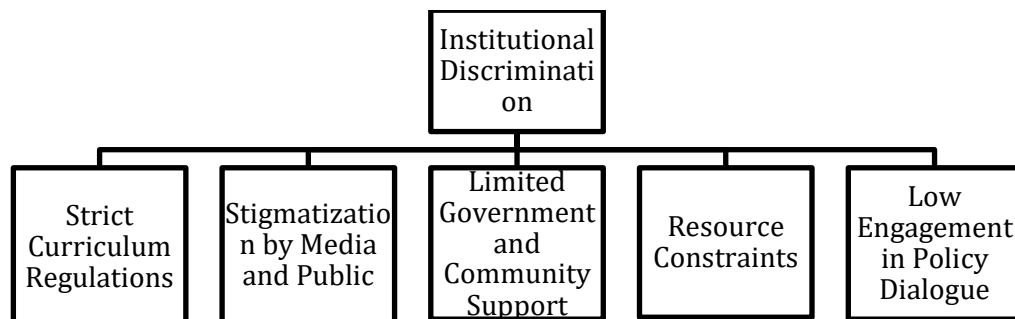

Figure 4. The Cycle of Structural and Social Challenges in Islamic Education in the West

In addition to structural barriers, social challenges also arise from a lack of understanding and support from both the majority society and government regarding the contributions of Islamic education. This results in limited financial support, resource constraints, and restricted participation in national education policy dialogue. Several studies note that openness and partnerships between the government and Muslim communities are still greatly needed for Islamic education to function optimally in promoting integration, social participation, and interfaith harmony.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the complex yet constructive role of Islamic education in multicultural societies in Western countries. First, the function of Islamic education as a space for negotiating dual identities reflects the theoretical understanding that identity is dynamic, situational, and socially constructed (Tuna, 2024). Muslim students in Western contexts do not simply adopt a single identity but develop a hybrid identity that integrates both their faith and civic dimensions. This finding supports previous research by (Jones-Ahmed, 2022), which found that Islamic schools provide a space for young Muslims to affirm their religious identity without isolating themselves from broader society.

This process of identity negotiation is not merely passive but also critical and agentic. Students are encouraged to reflect on their dual attachment as Muslims, citizens, and members of a pluralistic society. These findings challenge the common narrative that religious education, particularly Islamic education, fosters segregation. On the contrary, faith-based education can empower students to develop a complex self-understanding that supports both spiritual growth and civic participation.

Second, the integration of civic values into the Islamic education curriculum demonstrates that Islamic education can engage with democratic and pluralistic values when approached contextually. This finding aligns with the concept of moderate secularism proposed by (Ozalp and Ćufurović, 2021; Whyte, 2022), in which religion is not excluded from the public sphere but recognized as a contributor to civic discourse. A study by (Aderibigbe et al., 2023) confirms that Islamic schools increasingly integrate civic education not as a state-imposed obligation, but as an inherent Islamic value grounded in justice (adl), cooperation (ta'awun), and responsibility (amanah).

This integration also responds to increasing expectations for Muslim communities to contribute to national cohesion. Rather than rejecting civic education, Islamic educators reinterpret it through an Islamic lens, creating a

culturally relevant framework for teaching democracy, participation, and coexistence (Cipollone et al., 2022). This model offers an alternative to assimilationist or purely secular approaches, which often overlook religious perspectives in education.

Third, the strategic role of Muslim educators as facilitators of intercultural understanding supports the literature on critical multicultural education (Fauzi & Sabila, 2022; Markey et al., 2021). These educators act as cultural mediators, demonstrating and modeling how to remain faithful to religious principles while participating constructively in pluralistic societies. They challenge both external negative stereotypes of Muslims and internal narratives that could lead to isolation or victimhood. (Zaidi, & Perry, 2025) emphasize the importance of Muslim educators in creating inclusive classroom spaces that prepare students to engage fully in democratic life.

Their pedagogical practices include dialogic teaching, comparative ethics, community engagement, and critical discussions on social justice (Sulé et al., 2023). This positions Islamic education as a transformative force not only for Muslim communities but also for multicultural education paradigms seeking to embrace diversity without erasing differences.

Fourth, structural and social challenges identified in the literature, such as Islamophobia, restrictive policies, and marginalization, underscore the importance of educational equity and institutional recognition (Gawo & Tafesse, 2024; Alam & Mohanty, 2023). Although Islamic education demonstrates potential in fostering positive citizenship, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the prevailing socio-political context. Documentation shows that strict secularism and exclusionary practices can undermine the goals of multicultural integration by delegitimizing faith-based contributions (Omoigberale et al., 2025).

Therefore, the role of state policy, public perception, and intercommunity dialogue cannot be overlooked. To support Islamic education as a partner in fostering citizenship, governments and education systems must move beyond mere tolerance toward recognition and active collaboration (Malazonia et al., 2023). This includes funding support, teacher training, curriculum flexibility, and inclusive policies that affirm the rights of all cultural and religious groups to fully participate in public education.

This study presents novelty through a systematic literature review approach that emphasizes the role of Muslim educators as transformative agents in integrating Islamic and civic values in Western contexts. Its theoretical contribution lies in enriching the discourse of multicultural education by incorporating Islamic epistemology into democratic civic discourse. Practically, the study offers curricular

guidance and pedagogical strategies for educators, as well as policy recommendations for education systems that are more inclusive of faith-based schools. The implications include the need for multicultural teacher training, educational policy reform, and further field studies to capture the empirical experiences of Muslim communities within Western educational environments.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that Islamic education in Western countries serves as an important space for negotiating dual identities, namely religious and civic identities that complement each other. Islamic education not only preserves Islamic values but also actively integrates democratic civic values into its curriculum. Muslim educators play a strategic role in facilitating the development of inclusive student identities and preparing them to participate actively in pluralistic societies. Practically, these findings have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and Muslim communities. First, governments in Western countries need to formulate more inclusive education policies so that Islamic schools can function as social and cultural bridges. Second, Islamic educational institutions are expected to strengthen integrative curricula that accommodate both Islamic and civic values. Third, Muslim educators require ongoing professional training to enhance their pedagogical competence and multicultural sensitivity.

However, this study has several limitations. First, it relies solely on secondary literature without empirical verification through field observation or direct interviews, so the findings are largely conceptual. Second, the research scope is limited to Western countries with publications from 2020-2025, which may not fully represent long-term developments or dynamics in other regions. Third, publication bias may occur, as most literature comes from English-language sources. Based on these limitations, further research is recommended to: (1) conduct field studies using qualitative approaches (e.g., in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and policymakers in Western Islamic schools); (2) develop cross-regional comparative studies to examine how Islamic education adapts in Asia, the Middle East, and Africa; and (3) integrate quantitative approaches to measure the impact of Islamic education on the formation of students' multicultural identities more objectively.

Thus, this study not only contributes theoretically to the discourse on Islamic education and multiculturalism but also provides practical guidance and policy recommendations relevant for enhancing the role of Islamic education in building inclusive and democratic societies in Western countries.

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