



The Survival of Multicultural Islamic Values in the Social Life of a Plural Society: A Case Study in East Kutai, Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia is a multicultural nation characterized by high levels of ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Within the Indonesian context, Islam, as the majority religion, is expected to play a strategic role in maintaining social harmony. This study aims to identify and analyse the multicultural Islamic values preserved within society, the processes through which these values are kept, and the factors that support and inhibit their preservation in the pluralistic society of East Kutai. The research employs a qualitative approach using a case study design, with data collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that Muslim communities in East Kutai have preserved multicultural Islamic values such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*‘adl*), brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and deliberation (*syura*). These values are internalized through Islamic religious education in schools, the exemplary conduct of religious and traditional leaders, and cross-cultural social practices such as communal work, joint religious gatherings, and interethnic forums. The preservation process is conducted collaboratively through inclusive village deliberations, public religious events, the integration of local values such as Kutai customs into Islamic preaching, and the use of social media to disseminate messages of religious moderation. Key supporting factors include the active role of interethnic leaders, the participation of interfaith communities, and the strong local spirit of kinship. Conversely, challenges include the potential for identity conflict, limited diversity literacy among segments of the population, and restricted digital access in certain areas. This study contributes to the development of a more adaptive and context-sensitive theory of multicultural Islamic education and recommends East Kutai as a social model for mainstreaming inclusive and moderate Islamic values in pluralistic societies.

Keywords: *Multicultural Islam; Islamic Values; Plural Society; Value Survival*

Introduction

Indonesia is a nation characterized by a high degree of cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. From Sabang to Merauke, the Indonesian people inhabit a social landscape rich in plural identities. Within this context, Islam as the majority religion plays a pivotal role in shaping the social fabric of society (Rashid, 2023). Islam is not merely understood as a spiritual doctrine but also as a value system

that governs interpersonal and intergroup relations within the community (Puyu et al., 2025). One concept that has emerged in response to this diversity is *Multicultural Islam*. This concept embodies both theological perspectives and social praxis, emphasizing values such as tolerance (*tasamuh*), cooperation (*ta'awun*), mutual understanding (*ta'aruf*), and justice and balance (*i'tidal*) in addressing differences (Barentsen, 2021). Multicultural Islam acknowledges diversity as a *sunatullah* a divine decree and as part of God's will that must be wisely managed. Accordingly, Islam is not in opposition to pluralism; rather, it provides a framework for nurturing harmony within a diverse society.

Within this framework, Azyumardi Azra in (Mardika & Ramli, 2024) emphasizes the importance of understanding Islam within the context of local culture, often referred to as Islam Nusantara a form of Islam that grows and evolves in harmony with indigenous traditions, cultural values, and local social realities. This perspective aligns with the notion of inclusive and multicultural Islam, which respects diversity and rejects exclusivism. Azra notes that the historical development of Islam in Indonesia has consistently been characterized by a process of accommodation and dialogue between normative Islamic texts and the socio-cultural realities of the community. Reinforces the view that Islam in Indonesia is inseparable from its local cultural expressions (Badrun et al., 2023). He advocates for a cultural Islam approach an interpretive model that addresses societal issues through empathy and humanism rather than purely normative or doctrinal means. According to (Akbar et al., 2025), the preservation of Islamic values must be grounded in social reality and articulated through cross-group social solidarity. In a complementary view, in (Taufiqurrohman et al., 2024) asserts that in the context of the Pancasila state, Islam should function as a moral force that supports democracy, the rule of law, and the protection of minority rights. Thus, the preservation of multicultural Islamic values constitutes a critical component in building a peaceful, just, and civilized Indonesian society.

One of the regions that best represents Indonesia's multicultural life is East Kutai Regency, located in East Kalimantan. This area is home to various ethnic groups such as the Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, Dayak, and other local communities. Its rich diversity makes East Kutai a compelling social laboratory, particularly in understanding how communities construct peaceful interethnic and interreligious relations. Amid this dynamic environment, Islam as the majority religion in the region is expected not merely to serve as a symbolic force, but to play a central role in nurturing pluralism and reinforcing social cohesion.

However, in the context of complex social realities, efforts to preserve multicultural Islamic values face numerous challenges. These include the rise of religious conservatism, the influence of social media in propagating exclusivist ideologies, and the lack of inclusive religious literacy at the grassroots level. Such conditions underscore the urgency of exploring how local communities, particularly in East Kutai, respond to these issues and how the values of multicultural Islam are maintained and transmitted in everyday life.

Several previous studies have provided insights into how multicultural Islam is practised within local communities. For example, research by (Jubba et al., 2024) found that Muslim religious practices were able to synergize with local culture through inclusive religious traditions such as earth almsgiving (*sedekah bumi*), *maulid* celebrations, and inter-community Qur'anic study gatherings. Another study by (Fuadi et al., 2024; Muhammad & Duderija, 2022) showed that da'wah based on local wisdom was effective in promoting values of tolerance within multi-religious societies. In the context of Kalimantan (Halim et al., 2021; Shofa et al., 2023; Qodir, 2021; Haridison et al., 2024), research demonstrated that Muslim communities in remote areas were able to establish harmonious relations with Christian Dayak communities through cultural engagement and strong interpersonal communication. These findings suggest that the preservation of multicultural Islamic values is heavily dependent on the roles played by religious leaders, educational institutions, and social structures in transforming Islamic teachings into open and inclusive real-life practices.

East Kutai, with its diverse ethnic composition including Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, Dayak, and others, constitutes a socially complex region. Despite this complexity, interethnic and interreligious

interactions tend to be peaceful, supported by local wisdom and the active role of religious communities. Nevertheless, challenges persist, particularly with the emergence of intolerant narratives, religious exclusivism, and shifts in values-driven by modernization and digitalization. This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding how multicultural Islam is preserved at the grassroots level particularly in peripheral regions such as East Kutai in Kalimantan, which remains underexplored in scholarly discourse. By employing a case study approach within this local context, the research seeks to deepen understanding of how multicultural Islamic values are practised in Indonesia through a socio-religious lens that is both contemporary and contextually relevant.

This study aims to explore and describe the multicultural Islamic values preserved within the pluralistic society of East Kutai, to analyze the processes through which these values are sustained, and to identify the various factors that either support or hinder the preservation of multicultural Islamic values amid the region's diversity. Accordingly, this research is expected to offer both conceptual and practical contributions to the reinforcement of moderate, inclusive, and contextually grounded religious practices within a pluralistic society.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design, aiming to explore in depth the socio-religious dynamics and the practices of preserving multicultural Islamic values within the pluralistic society of East Kutai Regency. The case study approach was selected as it allows for a contextual understanding of social realities and provides insights into the meanings behind religious behaviours and practices (Bogdan et al., 2011). The research was conducted in East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan Province, focusing on several areas characterized by high levels of ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, namely North Sangatta, South Sangatta, Rantau Pulung, and Bengalon Districts.

The research subjects included religious leaders (ustadz, da'i, khatib), interethnic community figures, Islamic education teachers, and Muslim residents from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and Dayak Muslims. Data were collected through three primary techniques. First, participant observation was employed to directly observe social interactions and religious practices in daily life. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to explore their perspectives, experiences, and attitudes toward multicultural Islam. Third, documentation was used to collect supporting data in the form of records of religious activities, archives of religious organizations, and visual documentation reflecting the practice of multicultural values.

Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis technique proposed by (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014), which consists of three main stages: data condensation, namely the process of selecting and filtering relevant information; data display in the form of narratives, matrices, or charts to identify patterns and emerging themes; and conclusion drawing, conducted iteratively and verified through triangulation. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation (comparing data from different informants) and methodological triangulation (comparing findings from observation, interviews, and documentation). Further validation was carried out through member checking by seeking clarification or confirmation from informants regarding the interpreted data (Cole, 2023; Motulsky, 2021). This approach enabled the collection of in-depth, valid, and contextual data related to the preservation of multicultural Islamic values in the plural society of East Kutai.

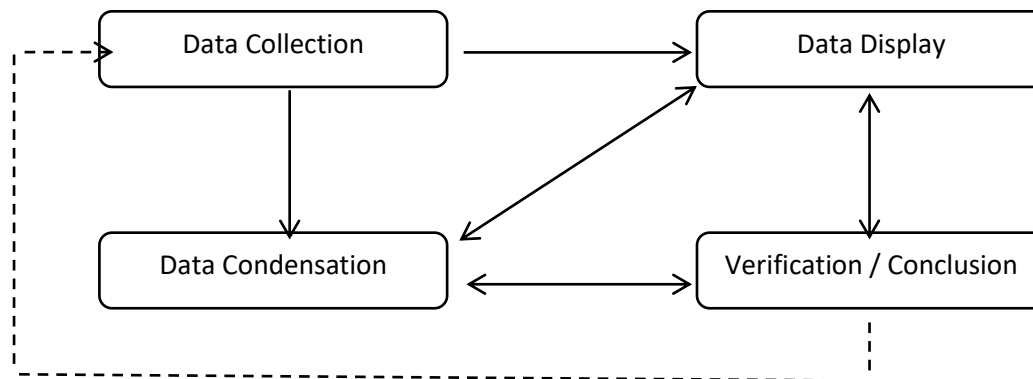


Figure 1: Qualitative Data Analysis Model (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2014)

Discussion

The Preservation of Multicultural Islamic Values in the Context of Social Diversity in East Kutai

Field findings indicate that the Muslim community in East Kutai consistently preserves a set of multicultural Islamic values in their socio-religious life. The preservation of these values is evident in various social activities involving interethnic and interfaith interactions, as well as in their perspective that differences are part of cultural richness.

First, the value of tolerance (*tasamuh*) is reflected in the community's openness to the cultural and religious practices of other groups. This is observable in the participation of Muslim residents in interfaith and interethnic cooperation activities (*gotong royong*), their involvement in religious holiday celebrations of other groups, and in customary deliberation forums (*musyawarah adat*) that include diverse ethnic communities. In the district of Sangatta, for instance, residents from Bugis, Banjar, Javanese, and Dayak Muslim backgrounds demonstrate acceptance of diverse cultural and religious expressions without significant social conflict. Second, the value of justice ('*adl*) is manifested in collective decision-making processes that do not favour any particular ethnic group. This is evident in the equitable and transparent distribution of social assistance, as well as in the management of places of worship such as mosques, which involve administrators from various ethnic backgrounds. In several multiethnic village mosques in Bengalón, for example, the organizational structure is deliberately designed to inclusively reflect the demographic composition of the local community.

Third, the value of brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*) serves as a strong foundation in the social interactions of the Muslim community in East Kutai. This includes not only Islamic brotherhood (*ukhuwwah islamiyyah*) among fellow Muslims but also national brotherhood (*ukhuwwah wathaniyyah*), which fosters harmonious relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims. In everyday practice, the community demonstrates a high degree of solidarity among residents, especially in emergency situations such as natural disasters or urgent communal needs. Fourth, the value of deliberation (*shura*) is actively upheld through both formal and informal forums that prioritize collective aspirations. *Shura* serves as a key mechanism for resolving strategic issues, including the construction of places of worship, land dispute settlements, and decision-making related to religious and social activities. This process involves not only religious and community leaders but also representatives from various ethnic groups and age categories, reflecting an inclusive practice of deliberative democracy.

The above field data indicate that the preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai reflects a collective awareness among Muslim communities to cultivate a harmonious coexistence amidst diversity. These values function not only as religious social norms but also as strategic instruments for maintaining social stability and strengthening intergroup cohesion.

The data indicate that the strong practice of tolerance in East Kutai creates space for cultural and religious diversity in daily life. This aligns with the concept of *Islam Nusantara*, which emphasizes an inclusive approach and harmony with local culture, upholding the principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* and interreligious benevolence. A study by (Umar, 2024; Suryani & Muslim, 2024), highlighting that the integration of Islamic ethics within multicultural education enhances attitudes of tolerance and openness. Furthermore, collective decision-making processes that are free from ethnic or religious bias reflect the social function of *'adl* (justice) as a universal Islamic principle. Azyumardi Azra identifies *'adl* and *wasatiyyah* (moderation) as essential values in multicultural Islamic education and within the ideological framework of *Pancasila* (Irawan & Arif, 2024). The inclusive practices observed in East Kutai thus contribute to social stability and justice, particularly in the management of religious and social resources.

The development of both *ukhuwwah islamiyyah* (Islamic brotherhood) and *ukhuwwah wathaniyyah* (national brotherhood) among the multiethnic communities in East Kutai reflects the internalization of values of solidarity and equality. This structure mirrors patterns of social integration found in studies of Muslim minority communities, such as in Tanjung Labu, where social and economic relationships across groups are grounded in mutual togetherness.

The value of *musyawarah* (deliberation) as a conflict mediation tool and in collective decision-making embodies the practice of deliberative democracy. This is consistent with the findings of (Nurhidayati & Suharno, 2025), who argues that inclusive deliberative forums contribute to the development of tolerant character and respect for pluralism. The deliberative practices in East Kutai involve diverse groups, reflecting a form of multicultural Islamic education that is both autonomous and adaptive.

Table 1. Preserved Islamic Values Amid Cultural Diversity in East Kutai

No.	Aspect	East Kutai Practices	Findings from Previous Research
1	Tolerance	<i>Gotong royong</i> (mutual cooperation) & interfaith celebrations	Islamic education enhances students' openness and intercultural understanding
2	Justice (<i>'adl</i>)	Inclusive distribution of aid & multiethnic mosque governance	<i>'Adl</i> and <i>wasatiyyah</i> are reflected in national ideology and educational practices
3	Brotherhood (<i>ukhuwwah</i>)	Inter-community support during emergencies	Social integration among Muslim minorities is grounded in education and shared economic activities
4	Deliberation (<i>musyawarah</i>)	Conflict resolution in religious-customary matters	Multicultural education fosters peaceful character and respect for pluralism

Multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai are transmitted not only through verbal means such as advice, religious sermons, and study circles but are also concretely instilled through exemplary conduct and active participation in socio-religious activities. Religious leaders, traditional figures, and community leaders from diverse ethnic backgrounds play a pivotal role as moral exemplars, embodying tolerant, just, and open-minded attitudes in their daily interactions. They do not merely articulate Islamic teachings; rather, they demonstrate these values through their actions such as attending intercultural events, engaging in community deliberations (*musyawarah*), and participating in interfaith and interethnic communal work (*gotong royong*).

Furthermore, various communal and religious events such as Islamic holidays, mosque construction volunteerism, and intergroup social gatherings serve as strategic spaces for the collective transformation of multicultural Islamic values. Through active involvement in these activities, community members directly learn the importance of togetherness, mutual respect, and the preservation of harmony amid diversity. The preservation of multicultural Islamic values occurs holistically, encompassing not

only the cognitive domain but also the affective and practical dimensions of community life. In this sense, East Kutai functions as a social laboratory for multicultural Islam, where values are formed through lived experience and internalized via community-based interactions. This approach aligns with the theory of multicultural Islamic education *ta'awun* (mutual assistance), *tawassuth* (moderation), and *tawazun* (balance) as elaborated by (Mala et al., 2024). Integrating local values, such as *adat Kutai* (Kutai customary law), into the Islamic religious education curriculum is essential within the framework of Islam Nusantara.

This strategy aims to reinforce principles of moderation (*wasathiyah*) and interfaith tolerance by embedding local cultural practices into the internalization of Islamic values. Through context-based religious education that honours local wisdom, students not only comprehend Islamic teachings textually but also learn to apply them in diverse social realities. Such an approach makes Islamic education more grounded, relevant, and effective in shaping a generation that is both moderate and open-minded. To maintain social cohesion amid diversity, inclusive and representative *musyawarah* forums must be strengthened as a key pillar of pluralistic community governance.

The existing *syura* (consultative) mechanism, which has predominantly operated informally within society, needs to be facilitated through more structured and institutionalized means to ensure the inclusion of underrepresented groups, such as youth, women, and minority communities. Their active participation in decision-making processes will enhance their sense of ownership over the outcomes and strengthen cross-group social cohesion. This inclusive approach aligns with Islamic democratic values and upholds the principles of justice (*'adl*) and equality (*musawah*) in (Khasanah, 2023)

The preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai reflects a form of Islamic practice that is inclusive, contextual, and grounded in local realities. These values are not merely transmitted verbally but are brought to life through exemplary leadership, social participation, and the integration of local culture into religious and educational activities. This achievement demonstrates that multicultural Islam in East Kutai is not simply a theoretical construct but a tangible social reality shaped by harmonious interethnic and intercommunal interactions. Strengthening inclusive *musyawarah* forums and encouraging the participation of previously marginalized groups represents a strategic effort to sustain the values of moderation (*wasathiyah*), tolerance, and justice. In doing so, East Kutai offers a valuable model for building a peaceful, egalitarian, and culturally diverse society rooted in the universal values of Islam as a *rahmatan lil 'alamin* a mercy to all creation.

The Process of Preserving Multicultural Values Amidst the Diversity of East Kutai Society

Based on field observations and interviews, the preservation of multicultural Islamic values amidst the diverse society of East Kutai takes place through various social and cultural mechanisms that are integrated into the community's daily life. One of the primary channels of this preservation is education, both formal and non-formal. In schools particularly through the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subject teachers actively internalize the values of tolerance and diversity among students. This is achieved not only through the delivery of curricular content but also through exemplary attitudes demonstrated by teachers in fostering harmonious relationships with students from different ethnic backgrounds.

Beyond the school environment, religious activities such as regular Quranic study sessions, Friday sermons, and da'wah forums serve as important platforms to reinforce communal understanding of a peaceful and inclusive interpretation of Islam. Religious and customary leaders also play a central role in preserving multicultural values. *Ustadz* (Islamic scholars), *khatib* (sermon deliverers), and local customary figures often serve as mediators in social conflicts and facilitators of inter-community dialogue. They promote the concept of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin* Islam as a mercy to all creation through persuasive and peaceful approaches, emphasizing the importance of maintaining harmony within a multiethnic society.

Moreover, these community leaders frequently initiate cross-cultural activities that strengthen social bonds among citizens. Social engagements involving multiethnic groups have proven to be effective instruments in the transmission and preservation of multicultural Islamic values. For instance, religious gatherings (*majelis ta'lim*) attended by women from various ethnic backgrounds, interethnic family associations (*arisan*), and inclusive religious events such as the commemoration of the Prophet's birthday (*Maulid Nabi*) or communal iftars (breaking of the fast) are intentionally designed to engage all elements of society. These activities foster meaningful interactions that enhance the spirit of togetherness, mutual respect, and social solidarity.

Equally important, local media and digital *da'wah* platforms have also become vital tools for preserving these values. Several religious leaders in East Kutai utilize social media to disseminate messages of Islam that are peaceful, inclusive, and responsive to the multicultural realities of their communities. The *da'wah* content shared is not exclusive or divisive but instead promotes brotherhood and diversity as inherent aspects of the rich cultural heritage of *Islam Nusantara* (Islam of the archipelago). This illustrates that the preservation of multicultural Islamic values extends beyond physical communal spaces and dynamically evolves within digital platforms, effectively reaching younger generations and broader segments of society.

Table 2: The Process of Preserving Multicultural Values Amidst the Diversity of East Kutai Society

No.	Aspect of Preservation	Forms of Activities / Media	Roles and Impacts
1	Formal and Non-formal Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons in schools Regular Quranic study sessions, Friday sermons, and community <i>da'wah</i> forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers instill values of tolerance through curriculum and exemplary behavior Early internalization of multicultural values
2	Role of Religious and Customary Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mediation of social conflicts Religious sermons in public and religious forums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve as role models in peacefully resolving conflicts Promote <i>Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin</i> in a pluralistic society
3	Cross-ethnic Social Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-ethnic religious study groups (<i>majelis ta'lim</i>) Interethnic family gatherings Celebrations of the Prophet's birthday (<i>Maulid</i>) & communal iftar events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create interaction spaces that strengthen social cohesion Foster grassroots solidarity and inclusivity
4	Local Media and Digital <i>Da'wah</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Islamic content on social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, TikTok) Community <i>da'wah</i> groups via WhatsApp and Telegram 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate messages of peaceful and moderate Islam Reach younger generations and expand the adaptive dissemination of multicultural Islamic values

The preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai reflects social practices that align with the concept of multicultural education as articulated by (Banks & Banks, 2019), which emphasizes the importance of recognizing cultural diversity in both education and social life. The values of tolerance, justice, brotherhood, and deliberation, preserved through various social and religious channels, illustrate the strengthening of an inclusive identity within a multiethnic society. Sociologically, this process can also be analyzed through Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus and social capital in (Schirone, 2023). The habitus of the Muslim community in East Kutai, shaped by the interaction between Islamic teachings and local wisdom, produces stable and repetitive social practices that embody an open and inclusive

interpretation of Islam. Social capital, manifested in trust, religious leadership networks, and participation in cross-ethnic activities, reinforces social cohesion among diverse groups.

The role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers and religious leaders as agents of value transmission is highly relevant to the theory of social change agents. They do not merely convey normative teachings but contextualize them according to local realities and contemporary challenges, as examined by in the context of a moderate and adaptive Indonesian Islam. Furthermore, the use of digital media in Islamic proselytization (da'wah) supports the findings of (Aditia & Hafizah, 2024; Chalim et al., 2025), who argue that social media-based da'wah serves as a strategic medium to broaden the reach of moderate Islamic messages and foster awareness of diversity among the younger generation.

These findings resonate with research by (Latif & and Hafid, 2021; Alwi et al., 2022) on the strengthening of multiculturalism within Muslim communities in South Sulawesi, which demonstrates that interethnic social forums and collaborative religious gatherings can mitigate conflict and promote social unity. Thus, the preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai is not merely normative but constitutes a form of *living Islam* a contextualized and practised faith that significantly contributes to the construction of a peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive society.

The ongoing preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai stands as a tangible representation of harmonious diversity within the framework of moderate Islamic teachings. This process illustrates not only how Islamic values can synergize with local wisdom but also how social dynamics can adapt to the challenges of contemporary times. With the active involvement of PAI teachers, religious leaders, and digital media, values such as tolerance, brotherhood, and justice are not only taught but also embodied in the daily lives of the community. Therefore, this preservation effort should be continuously encouraged as a model of multicultural Islamic education that is both contextually relevant and socially integrative, reaffirming Islam's role as a source of mercy for all creation.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Preservation of Multicultural Islamic Values in a Plural Society

Based on observations and interviews conducted in several regions such as North Sangatta, South Sangatta, Bengalon, and Rantau Pulung, it was found that the preservation of multicultural Islamic values within the communities of East Kutai is influenced by several strong supporting factors, while also facing challenges in the form of specific inhibiting factors.

1.Supporting Factors

Field data reveal that the diversity of East Kutai society is the result of a long historical trajectory, particularly influenced by waves of transmigration during the 1980s and inter-island trade interactions that brought together various ethnic groups such as Javanese, Buginese, Kutai, Banjarese, and Torajan. These processes have fostered patterns of social relations characterized by harmony and mutual acceptance among ethnic communities. Interviews with a traditional Kutai leader in Sangatta indicate that intercultural coexistence has become an integral part of daily life, as he stated, "Living side by side is no longer a discourse, but a daily reality."

Religious and traditional leaders play a crucial role in maintaining and reinforcing this spirit of togetherness. They actively promote the importance of tolerance and mutual respect through various religious and cultural forums. A local *ustaz* in North Sangatta emphasized, "We are one big family; peace is impossible without mutual respect," highlighting the centrality of interethnic brotherhood.

Religious activities such as Friday sermons, Qur'anic study groups, and joint cultural events serve as effective mediums for cultivating and preserving multicultural Islamic values. Mosques, Qur'anic learning centres (*TPA*), and religious forums such as *majelis taklim* not only function as spaces for worship but also act as inclusive arenas for social interaction. A mosque administrator in Bengalon

explained, “Our study sessions are attended by participants from various backgrounds, and everyone helps each other,” demonstrating the high level of participation and communal spirit embedded in the religious life of East Kutai society.

2. Inhibiting Factors

Although the East Kutai community generally demonstrates an inclusive and open character, field data reveal the existence of small groups that tend to adopt exclusivist attitudes and isolate themselves from interethnic interaction. These groups are primarily active within their internal networks and exhibit resistance toward engaging in collaborative activities involving diverse social groups. This condition presents a significant barrier to building comprehensive social cohesion in a multicultural society.

One of the main factors reinforcing such exclusivist tendencies is the limited understanding among certain segments of the population regarding the concept of multicultural Islam. In an interview with an Islamic Education (PAI) teacher in the Rantau Pulung subdistrict, it was noted that some community members perceive differences in a negative light. The teacher stated, “Sometimes people see differences as faults rather than as a form of richness.” Such perspectives pose a serious challenge to the internalization of inclusive and moderate Islamic values.

Moreover, socio-political dynamics also contribute to the barriers to preserving multicultural harmony. During political moments, such as regional elections, there is a tendency for the instrumentalization of religious issues and ethnic sentiments as tools for political mobilization. In several instances, this has led to intergroup tensions and has undermined social harmony. Community leaders face a significant challenge in safeguarding religious spaces from being politicized or infiltrated by identity-based politics that may fragment the community. This phenomenon underscores the urgent need for systematic efforts to strengthen inclusive religious literacy and to protect communities from the politicization of religion.

Tabel 3: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Preservation of Multicultural Values

No.	Aspect	Supporting Factors	Inhibiting Factors
1	Historical & Social	Ethnic diversity as a legacy of transmigration and inter-island interaction	Emergence of exclusive groups that are closed to interethnic interaction
2	Role of Community Leaders	Religious and traditional leaders actively promoting tolerance and togetherness	Lack of inclusive Islamic literacy; rigid religious understanding
3	Religious Institutions	Mosques, Quranic schools (TPA), and Islamic study groups serve as centers for interethnic integration and multicultural values	Religious spaces are sometimes infiltrated by identity politics
4	Social Capital	Established trust, networks, and interethnic collaboration through joint religious activities	Potential for conflict when political or ethnic issues arise, especially during local political events
5	Education	Religious lectures, Friday sermons, and Islamic activities rich in values of tolerance (tasamuh), deliberation (syura), and brotherhood (ukhuwwah)	Educational curricula not yet fully contextualized to the multicultural realities of society

The data table above illustrates that the process of preserving multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai is supported by strong social capital. However, it still requires the reinforcement of mitigation strategies to address various inhibiting factors originating from both within and outside the community.

The preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai is a complex and dynamic social process, occurring within the framework of interethnic interaction, the strengthening of religious institutions, and the active involvement of community leaders. This phenomenon is significant to study, given the region's ethnic and cultural diversity, which demands integrative efforts to foster social harmony.

Referring to the theory of symbolic interactionism, the concept of social capital, and the principles of contextual Islam, the following discussion will explore how this preservation process unfolds, the supporting factors involved, and the challenges that must be anticipated to ensure the continual vitality of Islamic multicultural values in East Kutai society. Blumer in (Sjölje et al., 2022) posits that meaning is formed through social interaction and modified through ongoing interpretation. The preservation of multicultural values such as tolerance, deliberation (*musyawarah*), and brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), as practiced in interethnic forums in East Kutai, is the result of social symbols shaped through group interactions manifested in collective work (*gotong royong*), joint religious activities, and local cultural celebrations. One such example is the way the people of East Kutai perceive diversity not merely as coexistence but as a shared identity. This is evident in the active participation of all ethnic groups in religious events such as the celebration of the Prophet's Birthday (Maulid Nabi) and communal fast-breaking during Ramadan.

According to (Li et al., 2022; Saz-Gil et al., 2021), social capital encompasses networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation. In the context of East Kutai, the preservation of multicultural Islamic values is strongly supported by social capital in the form of interethnic trust, the involvement of religious leaders, and participation in shared religious activities. This social capital strengthens community cohesion and minimizes the potential for conflict. Religious figures who serve as mediators and educators of tolerance values play a key role within the social networks that reinforce interethnic solidarity.

Azra emphasizes that Islam as practiced in the Indonesian archipelago is contextual, inclusive, and capable of engaging in dialogue with local cultures (Azra & Hudson, 2008). Values such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *syura* (deliberation), and *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood) reflect a multicultural Islam that is harmoniously integrated with the local cultural values of society (Ghozali, 2021). In East Kutai, the integration of Kutai cultural traditions with Islamic teachings fosters a peaceful atmosphere and encourages interfaith harmony. For example, religious study groups (*pengajian*) and Friday sermons often convey messages of *Islam rahmatan lil 'alamin*, in alignment with the spirit of *Islam Nusantara*, which emphasizes respect for diversity.

Findings from other studies further support the field data regarding the preservation of multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai. For instance, research conducted by (Fitriyanto et al., 2024; Atmaja et al., 2023; Syarif & Herlambang, 2023) in West Kalimantan shows that the strengthening of multicultural Islamic values through mosque activities and religious education significantly contributes to building interethnic social cohesion. Inclusive religious activities held in mosques serve as key mediums for instilling values of tolerance, mutual respect, and communal brotherhood. These findings are highly relevant to the conditions in East Kutai, where religious institutions such as mosques, Qur'anic learning centers, and study forums function as centers for social integration and the preservation of multicultural values.

In *Islam and Tolerance in Multicultural Society*, underscores the importance of inclusive religious literacy and the capacity-building of religious leaders in fostering tolerant attitudes (Zainuddin, 2021; Momin, 2001). She argues that when religious leaders possess an open and moderate understanding of Islam, they are better equipped to counter exclusivism within the community. This aligns with field findings in East Kutai, which highlight the challenges posed by limited religious literacy and the presence of exclusive Islamic groups that are less adaptive to the region's multicultural realities.

Furthermore, (Arfaton et al., 2025), highlight the importance of introducing multicultural education from an early age as a foundation for cultivating peaceful coexistence in diversity. They emphasize that religious education curricula must be adapted to the local socio-cultural context to make

values of tolerance more grounded and relevant. This emphasis is also highly applicable to the needs of East Kutai, which has a strong historical background of migration and ethnic diversity. In such a context, contextualized education proves more effective in internalizing the values of multicultural Islam. Thus, these research findings not only support field observations in East Kutai but also indicate that strategies for preserving multicultural values rooted in religion need to be systematically developed through education, the empowerment of religious leaders, and the optimization of the roles of religious institutions.

Accordingly, the process of preserving multicultural Islamic values in East Kutai is actively carried out through social interaction, the exemplary conduct of religious leaders, and the strengthening of religious institutions. However, the success of this process depends significantly on the extent to which the community possesses social capital, a moderate understanding of Islam, and the capacity to safeguard religious spaces from the infiltration of political interests and narrow identity ideologies. Strengthening religious literacy and promoting multicultural education are therefore essential strategies in addressing these challenges.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Muslim community in East Kutai has successfully preserved multicultural Islamic values in their religious and social life actively and holistically. The core values internalized include tolerance (*tasamuh*), justice (*'adl*), brotherhood (*ukhuwwah*), and deliberation (*syura*), which are manifested in daily interethnic and interreligious social practices. These values are not only transmitted through verbal teachings and formal education such as Islamic Religious Education subjects but are also instilled through the exemplary conduct of religious, traditional, and community leaders. They are further reinforced through various socio-religious activities such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), religious study groups (*pengajian*), and community forums (*silaturahmi*). The preservation of these values is also supported by inclusive deliberative forums, the active role of intercultural leaders, and the integration of local wisdom such as Kutai customs into religious teachings. Moreover, social media is utilized as an effective medium to disseminate messages of moderation and diversity. This entire process reflects the practical implementation of a multicultural Islamic education that is adaptive, inclusive, and contextual. It contributes to sustaining social harmony, strengthening intergroup solidarity, and shaping a generation that is moderate, tolerant, and open to diversity. These findings also reinforce the theoretical framework of multicultural Islamic education, which emphasizes the adaptation of Islam's universal values to local sociocultural contexts. Consequently, East Kutai can be regarded as a social model of multicultural Islam in Indonesia where Islamic values are not merely understood as doctrine but are actively lived out in the daily interactions of a pluralistic society.

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