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### **AZYUMARDI AZRA'S THOUGHTS ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF MULTICULTURAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION TO STRENGTHENING INDONESIAN NATIONALISM**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study, conducted as a literature review, aims to describe Azyumardi Azra's views on strategies for strengthening Indonesian nationalism through multicultural Islamic education. The findings indicate that, in Azyumardi Azra's view, multicultural education not only fosters tolerance but also serves as the ideological foundation for inclusive nationalism. In Indonesia's pluralistic society, this education shifts the paradigm of nationalism from homogeneous to pluralistic, transforming differences into a source of national strength. This study contributes to the assertion that multicultural education strengthens social cohesion, builds an adaptive national identity, and prevents identity-based horizontal conflicts.

**Keywords:** *Azyumardi Azra, Multicultural Education, Indonesia.*



## A. Introduction

Multicultural education to strengthen Unity in Diversity means studying the cultural diversity of past and present Indonesian societies, which are undergoing demographic and sociocultural changes. Such education can enhance knowledge and understanding among diverse and mutually supportive cultural groups.(Azra, 2019). And one way to prevent social discrimination and social conflict is to provide multicultural education. In addition, problems such as national disintegration, corruption, moral decadence, and religious-based violence continue to color the lives of the Indonesian people. The plurality factor in Indonesia can be considered good because it makes differences a strength, but it can also have negative effects, such as security instability, social disharmony, and economy. Thus, a new paradigm of multicultural education must emerge (Retnasari & Hidayah, 2019).

Topics on multicultural education are often discussed in journals that focus on education for gifted students, but conversely, issues related to gifted education rarely receive attention in publications that study multicultural education (Chamberlin, 2008). Most of the research highlights multicultural learning environments with a primary focus on diverse stakeholders, especially students from different levels of education as well as pre-service teachers (Uzunboylu, H., & Altay, O, 2019). The results emphasize the importance of strengthening educational experiences and approaches designed to support the development of cognitive and socio-emotional skills, facilitate peace, prevent violence through educational channels, and enhance their scientific presence (Elihami & Melbourne, M 2022).

One important way to strengthen unity in diversity in Indonesia is through multicultural education. Multiculturalism is an understanding that believes that various ethnic or cultural groups in society can coexist harmoniously, characterized by mutual respect for one another (Kholil, 2022). By studying the cultural diversity of Indonesian society, we can increase our knowledge and understanding of various diverse cultural groups. This can help us to better appreciate and respect the differences that exist among us. Multicultural education can also help us understand that cultural and ethnic diversity is a strength, not a weakness. ("Islamic Educational Thought in Indonesia: Study of Azyumardi Azra's Thought," 2020) By recognizing and appreciating the importance of this equality, we can build a more inclusive and tolerant lifestyle. Therefore, we argue that multicultural education should be a priority in Indonesia's education system. We must ensure that the younger generation has sufficient knowledge and understanding of the cultural and ethnic diversity in Indonesia, so that they can become more tolerant and inclusive citizens who appreciate the differences that exist among us (Prasetiawati, 2017).

The uniqueness of this research object lies in analyzing the paradigm shift from intercultural education to multicultural education in creating tolerance and social harmony (Hafid, 2020). If intercultural education is oriented towards transforming individual behavior to appreciate other cultures, multicultural

education emphasizes understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity in order to create social justice (Hall et al., 2018) While intercultural education is often not successful enough in addressing social conflicts at the community level, multicultural education seeks to reduce prejudice and discrimination by creating a shared awareness of equality in diversity. As such, this research explores how multicultural education can serve as a solution to creating social cohesion in ethnically and religiously diverse societies (Gollnick, D. M., & Chinn, P. C. 2017).

This research uses a multidisciplinary approach that includes historical, sociological, and political aspects in examining the revitalization of nationalistic insight in Indonesia. From a historical perspective, this research examines the dynamics of changes in national values in various periods of government. Meanwhile, the sociological perspective is used to analyze how national values are reproduced in society through education, media, and state policies (Azra, 2019). In the political dimension, this research considers the role of political actors in maintaining or changing national insight in accordance with certain ideological interests (Poeloengan, 2020) The main argument of this research is that the revitalization of nationalistic insight is an urgent need in facing the challenges of globalization and digital disruption, which can erode national identity and solidarity if not managed properly. Thus, a comprehensive and sustainable strategy is needed to ensure that nationalistic insight remains relevant and effective in the life of the nation (Widisuseno & Sudarsih, 2019).

The purpose of this research is to analyze Azyumardi Azra's thoughts on the role of multicultural education in strengthening Indonesian nationalism. The method used is a literature study with a content analysis approach, where primary data is taken from Azra's article on pages 198-201. Secondary data is obtained from literature related to multiculturalism and nationalism to strengthen the analysis. This study aims to understand how the concept of multicultural education offered by Azra can be implemented in national education policy to create a harmonious and nationalistic society.(Saragih & Siregar, 2023) In addition, this study also explores the relevance of Azra's thoughts in facing social and political challenges in Indonesia today, especially related to increasing social polarization and the strengthening of identity politics. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to formulating educational strategies that are more inclusive and oriented towards strengthening nationalism amid the diversity of Indonesian society (Alawi & Maarif, 2021).

Multicultural education in Indonesia aims to introduce and appreciate cultural diversity, taking into account the demographic changes and sociocultural dynamics of society. Rooted in interculturalism awareness after World War II, this approach initially emphasized changes in individual behavior in order to appreciate other cultures and foster a spirit of tolerance. Along with the times and to deal with more

complex social conflicts, multicultural education now prioritizes issues related to injustice, discrimination, and empowerment of minority groups. Important themes such as tolerance, cultural and religious differences, anti-discrimination, conflict resolution and human rights need to be integrated into the education curriculum. This aims to strengthen the understanding of diversity and the values of Pancasila among the younger generation (Azra, 2019).

The importance of multiculturalism in the dissemination of values in the life of Indonesian society is something that is very much needed. This is because multiculturalism as an ideology is considered to be a solution to various social problems caused by social differences. Such a statement theoretically can also be reflected from various considerations, as follows. First, the awareness of understanding and attitude that differences are natural facts and must be recognized. Socio-cultural diversity shows the existence of visions and systems, so that one culture needs another culture.(Aini, 2025) Consequently, by studying other cultures, it will be able to expand the horizons of understanding. Third, cultural plurality requires a space for continuous dialogue for the realization of unity (Azra, 2019).

## **B. The Theory of Multicultural Islamic Education**

Multicultural Islamic education is rooted in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, who sought to free society from oppression and heresy. This education not only serves as a transfer of knowledge, but also builds awareness of social and cultural diversity. In this context, it explains that multiculturalism involves the recognition and legitimization of cultural plurality, while Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the acceptance of unity in a diverse society. (Khair et al., 2024). H.A.R. Tilaar explains that multiculturalism involves the recognition and legitimization of cultural plurality, while Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the acceptance of unity in a diverse society. The integration of multiculturalism into Islamic education is essential to equip learners with tolerance and intercultural competence in the face of global diversity. (Rofiqi et al., 2023).

The main objective of multicultural Islamic education is to shape the personality of students who reflect values such as honesty, tolerance and justice, in accordance with the principles of the SISDIKNAS Law which emphasizes democratic education and respect for human rights. As stated by Arifin (2020), Multiculturally oriented Islamic education enables learners to interact in a pluralistic environment in an inclusive and ethical manner. (Yusuf & Wahyuni, 2025). Thus, multicultural Islamic education plays an important role in creating an inclusive and respectful society (Dwi & Maskuri, 2023).

Relationships According to Imam Al-Ghazali's Thought emphasizes the importance of a moderate understanding of religion to deal with the complexity of differences in multicultural societies. However, inequality in religious

understanding can lead to extremism and radicalism. Therefore, Islamic education based on religious moderation is very urgent to implement. Imam Al-Ghazali's views on balance in religion can be a strong basis in education to ward off radicalism and strengthen the values of moderation (Irmawati & Mardiana, 2024). For example, conflict and extremism prevention, multicultural education encourages intercultural and interreligious dialog. By understanding differences, individuals are more likely to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts and less likely to fall into religious extremism (Irmawati & Mardiana, 2024) Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the context of a multicultural society faces various challenges that require strategic transformation. One of the main challenges is the diversity of cultures, ethnicities, and beliefs that require the cultivation of religious moderation values, such as tolerance, inclusiveness, and respect for differences. (Nuriz, 2018) To overcome this, PAI must integrate moderation values into its curriculum and learning methods. (Yanto et al., 2023) For starters, multiculturalism in Indonesia is largely understood and practiced not as a philosophical and political discourse in academia, or a public policy (such as "affirmative action" in Canada and Australia), but rather as an "experience of life and encounters between different people" (Putranto, 2012).

Multicultural Islamic education is implemented through formal and nonformal education. In formal education, multicultural values are integrated into the curriculum and teaching materials. At SD Inpres 38 in Sorong Regency, for example, Islamic religious education teachers instill multicultural values in the learning process due to the students' diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. (Zaman & Munadi, 2025) Instilling these values is important for preventing conflicts in the school environment and society and supporting the creation of religious moderation that respects differences. (Fauzi et al., 2022).

### **C. Multicultural Indonesian Society**

A multicultural perspective views ethnic, religious, racial, and cultural diversity as a societal asset that must be valued and preserved. The goal is to create a just society that is free from prejudice and discrimination. Multicultural education is an important process that instills tolerance, respect for differences, and equality between community groups from an early age. (Wales, R. 2022). In the context of pluralistic Indonesia, this is very important in order to minimize the potential for social conflict. Educational institutions play a significant role in promoting multicultural values by fostering a generation with multicultural skills, cultivating tolerance, and establishing an inclusive school environment that embraces differences. (Furqon.M, 2020). An appropriate implementation strategy is needed to ensure that these values are not just discussed, but also put into practice in daily life at school and in the community. (Suparlan, 2014). Multiculturalism reflects the Islamic values of tolerance and respect for diversity exemplified by the Prophet

Muhammad. The Quran encourages understanding despite differences, which must be upheld to maintain unity.(Anis et al., 2024). Multicultural education should be in line with the nation's character-building goals and implement Islamic values that emphasize tolerance and respect for diversity, as practiced by the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and stated in the Qur'an. (Nuriz, 2018). Therefore, multicultural education is an effective way to build an inclusive, equitable, and harmonious Indonesian society.

Multicultural life and education are important aspects of creating a harmonious, tolerant, and inclusive Indonesian society. (Firtikasari & Andiana, 2023). Multiculturalism is a cultural concept that serves as a guide to life. Unlike mere ethnic and cultural diversity, multiculturalism emphasizes equality among cultures and ethnic groups within the context of a nation or state. (Suparlan, 2014). According to Karim (Abdul G., 2010), multiculturalism views social diversity as a natural condition. Therefore, fostering the spirit of multiculturalism means promoting equality within diversity. In a multicultural society, mutual relations between groups are important and must be supported by three types of competencies: cultural, societal, and personal. (Arif, 2014). Multiculturalism is not only about recognizing differences; it also involves placing those differences in a balanced manner. This concept is known as "*symmetrical differentiated citizenship*," which acknowledges the diversity of identities within society. This approach is expected to help people avoid the pitfalls of primordial or sectarian issues that have the potential to disrupt social harmony. (Budiatri et al., 2017). Multiculturalism emphasizes the recognition and equality of cultural diversity. It should be implemented through inclusive policies and reflected in political consciousness. (Kholil, 2022).

Multiculturalism emphasizes the importance of intercultural relations, recognizing that the existence of one culture depends on the existence of others and must respect them. This understanding gives rise to values such as equality, tolerance, and mutual respect for diversity. Building a multicultural society in Indonesia requires establishing the principle of equality in diversity as the ideological foundation. According to Bhikhu Parekh (2001), multiculturalism encompasses three aspects: relating to culture, recognizing cultural plurality, and offering perspectives on responding to diversity(Ward et al., 2025) Therefore, multiculturalism is not merely a practical political strategy but an ideology that requires fair and equal policies for managing cultural diversity, especially amid increasing human mobility between regions. (Harahap, 2006).

#### **D. Azyumardi Azra's View on the Urgency of a Multicultural Islamic for Building Indonesian Nationalism**

Azyumardi Azra explains that the meaning of Islamic education is broad and aims to prepare quality generations. He emphasizes the importance of multicultural

education in response to diversity and demographic change. He also considers progress to be part of *sunnatullah*, or the natural order of things, and believes it should be appreciated. (Mahmudi 2022). Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the importance of an integrated Islamic education curriculum covering religious sciences, exact sciences, and 21st-century technology. This curriculum is essential for advancing society and restoring the glory of Islam through mastery of innovative science. (Halim, 2021).

Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the importance of a multicultural Islamic education that integrates science and technology. This approach is intended to prepare a generation to face the social and cultural changes and challenges of the 21st century. The education focuses not only on religious knowledge, but also on progress in the modern world (Halim 2021). Azyumardi Azra emphasizes a multicultural approach to Islamic education that aims to instill tolerance, humanism, and moderate values. This approach integrates science and technology education in order to address the dynamics of globalization (Islamy, 2022). This approach aims to restore the glory of Islam in science and technology with inclusive and adaptive Islamic education, shaping progressive and harmonious thinking for the younger generation. (Faizin 2022).

Azyumardi Azra argues that the multicultural character of Islam in Indonesia arises from its interaction with the local culture. He emphasizes that Islam Nusantara is inclusive and tolerant and can foster a stronger sense of nationalism by promoting the values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. (Prasetiawati, 2017). Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the importance of inclusive, tolerant, and respectful Islamic education. Through cultivating values such as tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and respect for cultural differences and beliefs, Islamic education can help overcome challenges in a pluralistic society. Islamic education shapes the morals and integrity of students, as well as conveying knowledge. By participating in social activities, students learn to care for others, cooperate, and respect different opinions. This approach fosters an inclusive attitude and the ability to make fair decisions. (Khasanah 2024).

Azyumardi Azra developed the concept of *Wasathiyah Islam* that emphasizes humanism, tolerance, mutual cooperation, and collective responsibility. He argues that the recontextualization of Islamic values is needed to realize justice, responsibility and equality in the context of public and state (Prasetiawati, 2017). Moderate Islam emphasizes the importance of adapting teachings to the context of the times, while maintaining moral and ethical values. This view considers that Islamic law has a dynamic and flexible nature in facing the development and challenges of an ever-changing era (Hamidah, 2019).

As the basis of the state and national ideology, Pancasila is very worthy to be used as a foundation in shaping attitudes and behavior, because it contains values

of divinity, humanity, unity, social, and justice. These values serve as guidelines in regulating social life in Indonesia (Warlim et al., 2023). Azyumardi Azra analyzes that multicultural education needs to strengthen Unity in Diversity as a response to value disorientation due to globalization. He criticizes the government for making Pancasila a formality without real practice and emphasizes the importance of strengthening national insight through multicultural education so that the values of Pancasila are lived out in people's lives.(Hamzah et al., 2022).

Indonesia has an extraordinary diversity of ethnicity, race, religion, culture and language. This diversity is often a source of conflict, but can be overcome through multicultural education that teaches respect for differences and tolerance. Azyumardi Azra emphasizes the importance of multiculturalism-based Islamic education to strengthen unity in diversity (Hamzah et al., 2022). Learning is not just about mastering concepts, but also involves understanding the culture in which they are used. For students to truly understand and be able to apply knowledge meaningfully, they need to engage in the community and culture of the practitioners. Thus, learning is a process of civilization (Brown et al., 1986).

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Referring to the subject matter of this position, it is concluded that in Azumardi Azra's view, infusing multicultural education has significant urgency towards strengthening Indonesian Nationalism. Multicultural education according to Azyumardi Azra plays an important role in strengthening Indonesian nationalism amid the challenges of globalization and identity crisis. This education supports the four pillars of nationalism: Pancasila, 1945 Constitution, Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI), and Unity in Diversity. First, Azra emphasizes the importance of recognizing cultural diversity in the education system. He rejects the homogeneous approach and encourages the integration of multicultural values in the formal and non-formal education curriculum. Second, multicultural education is believed to be able to revitalize national insight by fostering social solidarity and awareness of the importance of unity in diversity. Third, multicultural education needs to be implemented in all education channels, from families, schools, to communities, with the support of an inclusive curriculum, teacher training, and intercultural dialogue spaces. Fourth, this education strengthens an inclusive, tolerant and democratic national identity, and shapes a young generation that respects differences and upholds national values. The government and education policy makers are expected to continue integrating multicultural values in the education system to build an Indonesian society that is united in diversity.

This study contributes to that the idea of strengthening nationalism through multicultural education based on moderation values has strong relevance in the context of diversity in Indonesia. However, the discussion in this study is still limited to the conceptual level and has not elaborated on the real application in the formal

education system. Therefore, further research is needed to explore further how the integration of multicultural values based on the principle of moderation can be optimally applied in the learning process at various levels of education.

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