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Reactualisation of Multicultural Islamic Education: The Perspective of Abdul Munir Mulkhan

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Mustamar Iqbal Siregar^{*1}; Moh. In'ami²; Afaf³
email: mustamariqbalsiregar@iainlangsa.ac.id

IAIN Langsa¹
IAIN Kudus²
Az-Zitouna University Tunisia³

Abstract

The cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity that characterises Indonesian society can often be a source of social friction if it is not balanced with inclusive and transformative education. Islamic education, as one of the dominant education systems in Indonesia, is still often trapped in a normative-doctrinal approach that lacks multicultural awareness. This article aims to examine Abdul Munir Mulkhan's thought as a conceptual offering in the reactualization of multicultural Islamic education that is more contextual and transformative. This research uses a qualitative approach to library research by examining the primary and secondary works of Abdul Munir Mulkhan and other relevant supporting literature. The results of the study show that Mulkhan offers a model of Islamic education based on transformative humanism and substantive multiculturalism through the concept of "transcendental-praxian Islam". Islamic education, according to him, should prioritise the marginalised as its main subject, respect spiritual pluralism, and be integrated with local values. This model not only rejects religious exclusivism, but also encourages a liberating and glueing social proxy. The implications of Mulkhan's ideas encourage curriculum reformulation, teacher training, and institutional policies that are responsive to the pluralistic realities of society. This reactualization is important to prevent radicalism, strengthen social cohesion, and form an inclusive and visionary generation of Muslims. Therefore, it is recommended that Islamic education stakeholders, both from the madrasah sector, Islamic boarding schools, and universities, adopt and implement a multicultural approach based on progressive Islamic values as initiated by Abdul Munir Mulkhan.

Keyword: *Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Islamic Education, Reactualization*

Abstrak

Keberagaman budaya, etnis, dan agama yang mewarnai masyarakat Indonesia kerap menjadi sumber friksi sosial apabila tidak diimbangi dengan pendidikan yang inklusif dan transformatif. Pendidikan Islam, sebagai salah satu sistem pendidikan dominan di Indonesia, masih sering terjebak dalam pendekatan normatif-doktrinal yang minim kesadaran

multikultural. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemikiran Abdul Munir Mulkhan sebagai tawaran konseptual dalam reaktualisasi pendidikan Islam multikultural yang lebih kontekstual dan transformatif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan menelaah karya-karya primer dan sekunder Abdul Munir Mulkhan serta literatur pendukung lainnya yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Mulkhan menawarkan model pendidikan Islam berbasis humanisme transformatif dan multikulturalisme substantif melalui konsep "Islam transendental-praksis". Pendidikan Islam, menurutnya, harus berpihak kepada kaum marjinal sebagai subjek utama, menghargai pluralisme spiritual, dan menyatu dengan nilai-nilai lokal. Model ini tidak hanya menolak eksklusivisme keagamaan, tetapi juga mendorong praksis sosial yang membebaskan dan merekatkan. Implikasi dari gagasan Mulkhan mendorong reformulasi kurikulum, pelatihan guru, dan kebijakan kelembagaan yang responsif terhadap realitas pluralistik masyarakat. Reaktualisasi ini penting untuk mencegah radikalisme, memperkuat kohesi sosial, dan membentuk generasi Muslim yang inklusif serta visioner. Oleh karena itu, disarankan agar para pemangku kepentingan pendidikan Islam, baik dari sektor madrasah, pesantren, maupun perguruan tinggi, mengadopsi dan mengimplementasikan pendekatan multikultural berbasis nilai-nilai Islam progresif sebagaimana digagas oleh Abdul Munir Mulkhan.

Kata Kunci: Abdul Munir Mulkhan, Pendidikan Islam, Reaktualisasi

Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia faces major challenges in responding to the complexities of a multicultural society. Gozali et al., (2024) As a country with ethnic, religious, cultural, and linguistic diversity, Indonesia needs an Islamic education system that is not only normative and doctrinal but also responsive to pluralistic social dynamics. In this context, the urgency of reorienting Islamic education towards a more multicultural direction is becoming increasingly apparent (Faridah, 2023).

The phenomena of intolerance, religious exclusivism, and radicalism that have infiltrated educational spaces indicate the weakness of the foundations of multiculturalism in the curriculum and pedagogical practices of Islamic education. Many Islamic-based educational institutions have not consciously cultivated in their students an appreciation for diversity and the ability to interact within a multicultural society. This situation highlights the gap between the ideal of Islam as a source of mercy for all creation and the actual educational practices taking place on the ground.

Various studies show an increase in intolerance among students in Islamic educational institutions, especially those that adopt a literal and exclusive approach to religious texts (Sawaty, 2025). Some madrasahs and

Islamic boarding schools are even suspected of being fertile ground for segregative ideologies that reject diversity (Kementerian Agama, 2019). Fenomena ini tentu bertentangan dengan nilai-nilai Islam yang menjunjung tinggi keadilan, kemanusiaan, dan persaudaraan universal (Wahid Institute, 2019).

In situations like this, Abdul Munir Mulkhan's ideas are highly relevant to be re-actualised. Mulkhan is known as a Muslim intellectual who consistently promotes a humanistic, transformative, and multicultural paradigm of Islam (Khasanah, N., Aravik, H., & Hamzani, 2022). His ideas emphasise the importance of Islamic education that liberates, empowers, and is capable of integrating local values within the framework of Islamic universality. Mulkhan's perspective offers an alternative to the Islamic education model that has tended to be exclusive and normative.

Based on the above description, this article aims to examine and reactualise Abdul Munir Mulkhan's thoughts in the context of multicultural Islamic education. Through a qualitative approach based on literature study, this research will explore Mulkhan's main ideas and assess their relevance to the issue of diversity in contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach, utilising a literature review method. (*library research*) (Lexy J. Moleong, 2019). The main focus of this approach is an in-depth examination of relevant literature, both Abdul Munir Mulkhan's primary works and secondary references that examine his thoughts. The main purpose of using this approach is to comprehensively explore Abdul Munir Mulkhan's philosophical and practical ideas from various sources.

The data collection technique in this study was conducted through a literature review sourced from written documents, both primary and secondary (Creswell, 2018). The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis. The data analysis steps are carried out in several stages: 1) Data reduction, which involves sorting and grouping texts that contain Abdul

Munir Mulkhan's key ideas about Islam and multiculturalism, 2) Theme categorisation, which involves identifying main themes such as 'contextual Islam', 'humanistic education', 'spiritual pluralism', 'marginalised groups', and 'social reconstruction of Islam,' 3) Interpretation of meaning, which involves interpreting the texts in their sociocultural, religious, and political contexts where the ideas developed, as well as examining their relevance to contemporary Islamic education discourse, and 4) Conceptual meaning extraction, which involves reorganising the results of interpretation into a systematic and relevant framework of thought for the reality of Islamic education in Indonesia. With this technique, the researcher not only explains what Mulkhan thought, but also how and why these ideas are important to be re-actualised in Islamic education today.

Result

After gathering information and data, the author highlights four (4) points in this article, namely 1) Islam as a Humanistic-Transformative Movement, 2) Education for Marginalised Groups, 3) Spiritual Pluralism and Substantive Multiculturalism, and 4) Reactualisation of Multicultural Islamic Education in Indonesia.

1) Pendidikan Islam Humanistik-Transformatif

This model is based on the concept of Islamic education, which emphasises the essence of human beings as unique, creative, and independent creatures. Abdul Munir Mulkhan views education not as a tool for indoctrination, but as a means of humanising human beings through self-awareness and the critical development of personal potential (Ahmad, 2020). Within this framework, gnosis (spiritual awareness) becomes the philosophical foundation of education: the attainment of divine values in daily life, rather than merely the memorisation of rituals (Mulkhan, 2022). This addresses the problem of Islamic education, which has been too cognitive and dogmatic, and provides space for education to become an agent of social change.

A review of the literature shows that, according to Mulkhan, humanistic education encompasses three dimensions: affirmation of uniqueness (human uniqueness), accumulation of life experiences, and awareness of the reality of the universe (A.Mustika Abidin, 2021; Subaidi, 2017). This concept encourages education to not only transfer values, but also shape individuals who are capable of critical, creative, and contextual thinking (Chasanah & Ningsih, 2023; Nur'aini, 2021). This shows that the humanistic perspective contributes to a more democratic and inclusive educational paradigm, namely, providing space for all students to develop holistically within the social constellation.

2) Islamic Education for Marginalised Communities

Mulkhan explicitly places marginalised groups, such as scavengers, poor labourers, pedicab drivers, and marginalised citizens, as the main subjects of Islamic education (Santoso & Khoirudin, 2018). Education should be brought down to the grassroots level, favouring those who have been neglected by the formal education system (Sandora, 2019). The literature review also mentions that education for marginalised communities is not merely symbolic assistance, but rather part of a liberating social reconstruction that rebuilds the dignity of those who have been marginalised by unequal economic and political structures (Feryani & Nata, 2025; Khoirunnisa & Khoiri, 2025).

Mulkhan emphasised that Islamic educational institutions must serve as vehicles for social reconstruction, not merely as symbolic bureaucracies for the religious elite (Rohman, 2016; Santoso & Khoirudin, 2018). Neglecting the needs of marginalised groups is considered a moral failure of Islamic educational institutions in realising social justice (Malasyi et al., 2024). Previous studies have concluded that this type of educational model is capable of empowering students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to become agents of social change by increasing their critical awareness and ability to build communities based on egalitarian values.

3) Spiritual Pluralism and Substantive Multiculturalism

Mulkhan introduced the concept of spiritual pluralism as the foundation of multicultural Islamic education (Afiva & Albina, 2024). This principle rejects theological absolutism and supports spiritual inclusivity in social interactions (Azizah, 2023; Rouf, 2018). This is in line with the argument of pluralist educational thinkers who state that multicultural education is effective when it starts from the recognition of the value of goodness in other traditions, not just passive tolerance but active appreciation of diversity.

Mulkhan's model of pluralism education does not seek theological compromise, but rather builds ethical and spiritual dialogue among followers of different religions and cultures (Mu'ti, 2016). Thus, differences are not seen as threats, but rather as potential for social harmony that can be utilised in education. The Indonesian context, with its history of plurality and potential for identity conflicts, requires such an educational paradigm so that the younger generation can live in mutual respect without losing their respective identities.

4) Reactualisation of Multicultural Islamic Education in Indonesia

The reactivation of multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia is a response to the evolving social conditions amid increasing cultural, religious, and ideological diversity (Kadir et al., 2017). Abdul Munir Mulkhan's ideas about education that liberates, prospers, and upholds spiritual values of humanity provide a strong conceptual foundation for Islamic educational reform (Chasanah & Ningsih, 2023).

Islamic education can no longer be exclusive and oriented towards a single truth, because Indonesian society now lives in a pluralistic reality that demands healthy and productive social interaction. This idea is in line with Abuddin Nata's opinion that Islamic education must be integrated with social reality, not relying solely on texts but also on context (Nata, 2010). In the context of institutional practice, this reactivation requires

curriculum renewal, pedagogical approaches, and teacher training so that Islamic education can foster multicultural awareness and tolerance.

Multicultural education must be an integral part of national education design because it plays a strategic role in shaping inclusive citizens (Ma'arif, 2009). This is in line with the urgency of broadening religious understanding that is not only normative, but also ethical and dialogical, as stated by Maksudin & Jaenudin (2019). Contextual Islam should not be taught cognitively, but rather experienced in a relational process with the social reality surrounding the students (Supriatin & Nasution, 2017).

Discussion

Thought Mulkhan (2005) Multicultural Islamic education is relevant to the reality of Indonesian society, which is ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse. He believes that education should be a means of social liberation and strengthening solidarity between identities, not merely the teaching of religious doctrine (Mulkhan, 2002). This approach is in line with Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy theory, which emphasises dialogue, critical consciousness, and social change (Freire, 2014). The concept of transformative humanism offered by Mulkhan combines universal human values with the principles of social justice in Islam (Mulkhan, 2000).

This rejects discriminatory forms of education and reinforces the right of all groups to obtain quality education (Tilaar, 2004). According to Mahfud, humanistic multicultural education is the key to building social cohesion in a pluralistic country such as Indonesia (Mahfud, 2016). For Mulkhan, multiculturalism in Islamic education is not merely a formal recognition of diversity, but an appreciation of values that foster genuine respect for differences (Mulkhan, 1993). Multicultural education must be integrated into all subjects to consistently foster tolerance (Zamroni, 2004). In line with this, Banks refers to substantive multiculturalism as a curriculum strategy that emphasises social justice and equal opportunities (Banks & Banks, 2010).

Mulkhan's idea of spiritual pluralism views that every religion has human values that can be used as a basis for social cooperation (Mulkhan, 2005b). This approach is very important amid the tendency towards exclusivism, which often causes horizontal conflicts (Madjid, 1990). Asghar Ali Engineer (1990) also emphasises the importance of interpreting religion contextually to promote social harmony.

Mulkhan's ideas have practical implications for Islamic education reform, such as curriculum renewal, teacher training, and educational policies that integrate multicultural values (Mulkhan, 2002). This is in line with Abuddin Nata's view that Islamic education must be contextualised to the needs of a pluralistic society (Nata, 2005). In addition, UNESCO (1996) emphasising the importance of education that promotes peace, tolerance and solidarity as global goals for the 21st century.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that Abdul Munir Mulkhan's thinking on multicultural Islamic education offers a relevant paradigmatic approach to addressing the challenges of social diversity in Indonesia. According to Mulkhan, Islamic education should be humanistic, transformative, and pluralistic. By emphasising the principles of transcendental-practical Islam, advocacy for marginalised groups, and respect for spiritual pluralism, Mulkhan builds a foundation for education that is contextual and grounded. This idea is not only based on texts but also on the social reality of the community, which is often marginalised in the construction of formal education.

The re-actualisation of this thinking is urgently needed to be implemented systematically in the curriculum, teaching methodology, and character building of students in Islamic educational environments. This is so that Islamic educational institutions can produce a generation that is not only intellectually smart but also socially and spiritually mature in a multicultural society.

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