



INTEGRATING MULTICULTURAL ISLAMIC VALUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY FROM CENTRAL ACEH, INDONESIA

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Abstract: This article investigates the integration of multicultural Islamic educational values in early childhood learning, with a specific focus on TK Buah Hati Takengon, Central Aceh, Indonesia. Grounded in the local Gayo cultural context, this study examines how the school incorporates Islamic values and multicultural principles into its curriculum and pedagogical practices as a strategy to foster moderate Islamic education in a religious and ethnically diverse community. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight participants (three teachers, two school administrators, and three parents), classroom observations conducted across ten sessions over two months (March–April 2025), and document analysis of curriculum materials and lesson plans. The findings reveal three interrelated strategies: (1) integration of multicultural Islamic values in the curriculum through culturally responsive materials; (2) promotion of diversity and tolerance through cultural celebrations, open classroom dialogue, and peer interaction activities; and (3) inclusive pedagogical strategies that accommodate diverse learning styles alongside active parental involvement. The scientific novelty of this study lies in its documentation of a localized model of early childhood Islamic education that harmonizes tawhid-based moral values with Gayo cultural practices, offering a replicable framework for multicultural Islamic pedagogy in pluralistic societies. This study contributes to educational policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working to design inclusive Islamic education curricula that respond to multicultural realities in Indonesia and beyond.

Keywords: Integration, Multicultural Islamic Education, Early Childhood Learning, Gayo Local Culture, Moderate Islam, Aceh

Abstrak: Artikel ini meneliti integrasi nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam multikultural dalam pembelajaran anak usia dini, dengan fokus khusus pada TK Buah Hati Takengon, Aceh Tengah, Indonesia. Berakar pada konteks budaya Gayo setempat, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana sekolah tersebut mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Islam dan prinsip multikulturalisme ke dalam kurikulum serta praktik pedagogisnya sebagai strategi untuk mendorong pendidikan Islam moderat dalam komunitas yang religius dan beragam secara etnis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan delapan partisipan (tiga guru, dua kepala sekolah/pengelola, dan tiga orang tua), observasi kelas yang dilaksanakan dalam sepuluh sesi selama dua bulan (Maret–April 2025), serta analisis dokumen kurikulum dan rencana pembelajaran. Temuan penelitian mengungkap tiga strategi yang saling berkaitan: (1) integrasi nilai-nilai Islam multikultural dalam kurikulum melalui materi yang responsif secara budaya; (2) penguatan keberagaman dan toleransi melalui perayaan budaya, dialog terbuka di kelas, dan kegiatan interaksi antarsiswa; serta (3) strategi pedagogi inklusif yang mengakomodasi berbagai gaya belajar disertai keterlibatan aktif orang tua. Kebaruan ilmiah penelitian ini terletak pada pendokumentasian model pendidikan Islam anak usia dini berbasis lokal yang menyelaraskan nilai-nilai moral berbasis tauhid dengan praktik budaya Gayo, sehingga menawarkan kerangka kerja yang dapat direplikasi untuk pedagogi Islam multikultural di masyarakat yang pluralistik. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi bagi para pembuat kebijakan, praktisi, dan peneliti yang berupaya merancang kurikulum pendidikan Islam inklusif yang merespons realitas multikultural di Indonesia dan konteks serupa lainnya.

Kata Kunci: Integrasi, Pendidikan Islam Multikultural, Pembelajaran Anak Usia Dini, Budaya Lokal Gayo, Islam Moderat, Aceh

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a pivotal role in shaping the intellectual, social, and emotional development of young children (Corsaro, 2000; Durlak, 2010; Gregoriadis & Grammatikopoulos, 2014). It is during these formative years that children acquire foundational knowledge, skills, and values that will shape their lifelong learning journey (Anderson et al., 2003; Britto et al., 2017). In today's increasingly interconnected and diverse world, educational environments must embrace multiculturalism and foster understanding, empathy, and appreciation for different cultures and perspectives. This need becomes particularly urgent within the context of Islamic education in Indonesia, where the incorporation of multicultural values enables young learners to develop a holistic understanding of their faith while promoting inclusivity and awareness of cultural plurality.

Indonesia presents a distinctive context for multicultural Islamic education. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia is simultaneously home to over 300 ethnic groups and hundreds of regional languages. Central Aceh, the setting of this study, is particularly significant: it is a predominantly Muslim region inhabited by the Gayo people, an ethnic group with a rich cultural heritage including distinct traditions, language, and communal practices such as communal cooperation (*bersebuku*) and community deliberation (*musyawarah*). This local cultural fabric provides both a resource and a challenge for Islamic education, as educators must navigate the integration of universal Islamic principles with the specific values and practices of Gayo culture. Understanding how early childhood institutions manage this integration offers insights relevant not only to Aceh but also to other multicultural Muslim communities in Indonesia and beyond.

Despite growing scholarship on both multicultural education (Banks, 2015) and Islamic early childhood pedagogy (Riza, 2024), there remains a gap in research that examines their practical integration within a specific local cultural context at the kindergarten level. Previous studies have addressed aspects of multicultural curriculum design (Ojala, 2010), implementation of multicultural practices in early childhood settings (Vittrup, 2016), and the internalization of multicultural values through Islamic teaching methods (Junanto & Fajrin, 2020). However, these studies have not fully explored how a school grounded in Islamic values can operationalize a multicultural pedagogy that simultaneously honors local cultural identity. This study addresses that gap by focusing on TK Buah Hati Takengon, a kindergarten operating within the Gayo cultural milieu of Central Aceh, as a case study of localized multicultural Islamic education.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its documentation of a model of Islamic early childhood education that harmonizes tawhid-based moral values with Gayo cultural practices. Rather than treating Islamic values and local culture as separate or competing frameworks, TK Buah Hati Takengon treats them as mutually reinforcing foundations for children's character development. This study argues that such an integrated model constitutes a form of moderate Islamic education (*Islam wasathiyah*), one that affirms Islamic principles while remaining open to and respectful of cultural diversity. By

documenting this model in detail, the study offers a replicable framework for multicultural Islamic pedagogy in other pluralistic settings.

This article aims to: (1) analyze how TK Buah Hati Takengon integrates multicultural Islamic educational values into its curriculum; (2) examine the pedagogical strategies employed to promote diversity, tolerance, and harmonious coexistence; and (3) assess the role of parental involvement in sustaining this integrative approach. The insights gained from this study are intended to inform educational policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in their efforts to create inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environments for young children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education emphasizes the recognition and respect of diversity across multiple dimensions, including culture, ethnicity, language, and the varied life experiences of learners (Ali & Bagley, 2015; Banks, 2017). In the context of early childhood education, its primary objective extends beyond mere awareness of differences; it aims to cultivate children's understanding, empathy, and appreciation for diversity from an early age. By exposing young learners to multiple perspectives and experiences, multicultural education encourages the development of tolerant attitudes, prosocial behaviors, and inclusive mindsets essential for constructive social interactions both within and beyond the classroom.

Multicultural education also prepares children to navigate increasingly globalized and culturally interconnected societies. By fostering openness to diverse cultural norms and practices, children learn to value differences rather than perceive them as barriers. This early exposure promotes acceptance, reduces prejudice, and lays the foundation for harmonious coexistence with others who may hold different beliefs, languages, or customs. In this sense, multicultural education is not only a pedagogical approach but also a formative socialization process that equips children with the cognitive, emotional, and social competencies necessary for lifelong intercultural engagement and responsible global citizenship.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory provides an important theoretical lens for understanding multicultural education in early childhood. Vygotsky emphasized that learning is fundamentally a social process, shaped by interactions with more knowledgeable peers, teachers, and the broader cultural environment. In a multicultural classroom, children's zones of proximal development are enriched by encounters with diverse cultural perspectives, practices, and languages (Riza & Mistar, 2022). Teachers who scaffold these interactions, for example, by facilitating group projects that bring together children from different cultural backgrounds, support both cognitive development and the cultivation of intercultural competence.

Islamic Educational Values

Islamic education emphasizes moral, spiritual, and ethical principles derived from foundational Islamic sources, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, encompassing core concepts such as tawhid (belief in the oneness of God), ukhuwah (brotherhood), adl (justice), and ethical conduct (*akhlak*). In early childhood education, Islamic education

serves not only to impart religious knowledge but also to cultivate a strong religious identity, instill virtuous character traits, and encourage positive social behaviors among young learners. By integrating Islamic values into daily routines and learning activities, children are guided to internalize principles such as honesty, respect for others, empathy, and responsibility.

Beyond individual moral development, Islamic education provides a framework for social interaction that resonates with the goals of multicultural education. Both approaches converge in fostering tolerance, empathy, and harmonious relationships. The Qur'anic principle that God created human beings "as nations and tribes, that you may know one another" (Qur'an 49:13) is understood in Islamic pedagogy as a foundation for celebrating human diversity rather than merely tolerating it (Riza & Qodir, 2023). By embedding Islamic values within a culturally responsive pedagogy, children are guided not only to live according to ethical and religious principles but also to recognize, understand, and respect differences among their peers.

The intersection of Islamic and multicultural education in early childhood creates a holistic learning environment that promotes moral, social, and cultural competence. Children develop the ability to navigate diverse social contexts with empathy, inclusivity, and ethical awareness, preparing them to become socially responsible individuals grounded in moral values while being sensitive and respectful toward cultural diversity (Gorski, 2016).

Integration of Multiculturalism and Islamic Values in Early Childhood Education

The integration of Islamic values and multiculturalism in early childhood education involves aligning moral and spiritual principles with the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity. Research indicates that integrating Islamic values such as tawhid, noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*), and worship (*ibadah*) with local cultural values such as community cooperation (*gotong royong*), love for the homeland, and mutual respect can create a holistic and contextual curriculum. Such a curriculum not only supports children's intellectual development but also fosters strong character and a deep sense of identity (Sholeh et al., 2025).

In the Acehnese context, this integration has particular significance. Aceh is known as the "Veranda of Mecca" (*Serambi Mekkah*) for its strong Islamic identity, yet it is also home to diverse ethnic communities, including the Gayo, Alas, Aneuk Jamee, and Singkil peoples, each with distinct cultural traditions. Integrating Gayo cultural elements such as the traditional communal deliberation (*musyawarah*), oral poetry (*didong*), and agricultural ceremonies into an Islamic early childhood curriculum creates opportunities for children to see their local cultural heritage as compatible with and enriched by Islamic values. Studies have shown that this kind of localized integration significantly encourages an increase in students' understanding of religious diversity, forms an attitude of mutual respect, and encourages the creation of constructive interfaith and intercultural dialogue (Riza, 2019).

Teachers play an important role in promoting Islamic values within multicultural education settings, recognizing that their influence extends beyond academic instruction to shaping students' character and values. Consistent with character education theory, effective multicultural Islamic education in early childhood requires that teachers model

the values they seek to instill, demonstrating respect, empathy, and openness to diversity in their own interactions with children and families (Pepinsky et al., 2024).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the integration of multicultural Islamic educational values in early childhood learning at TK Buah Hati Takengon. A case study design was chosen because it enables a comprehensive exploration of the complex, context-specific factors that contribute to the integration process within its real-life setting (Ridder et al., 2014). The single-case design is appropriate here given the distinctive sociocultural context of TK Buah Hati Takengon within the Gayo community of Central Aceh.

The research was conducted at TK Buah Hati Takengon, a kindergarten located in Takengon, the capital city of Central Aceh Regency, during March and April 2025. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had direct knowledge and experience related to the school's multicultural Islamic educational practices. A total of eight participants took part in the study, consisting of three classroom teachers (with 3–12 years of teaching experience), two school administrators (the principal and the curriculum coordinator), and three parents of currently enrolled students. This sample size was considered appropriate for a qualitative case study, as it provided sufficient diversity of perspectives while remaining manageable for in-depth inquiry.

Three data collection methods were employed: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with each of the eight participants, lasting between 40 and 60 minutes per session. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The interview protocol covered themes including the school's approach to integrating Islamic and multicultural values, specific curriculum content and activities, challenges encountered, and the role of parents in the educational process. Open-ended questions were used to encourage rich, descriptive responses.

Classroom observations were conducted across ten sessions, encompassing both structured learning activities and free-play periods, over the two-month data collection period. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, the use of culturally responsive materials, the nature of peer interactions among children from different backgrounds, and the visible expression of Islamic values in daily routines (such as opening and closing prayers, sharing practices, and conflict resolution). Field notes were recorded during and immediately following each observation session.

Document analysis involved a systematic review of the school's annual curriculum plan, weekly lesson plans (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran Harian*, RPPH), student activity worksheets, and school policy documents. Documents were examined for explicit references to multicultural content, Islamic values, and local Gayo cultural elements.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following (Braun & Clarke, 2022) six-phase framework. The process involved: (1) data familiarization through transcription and repeated review of interview recordings, observation notes, and

documents; (2) initial coding of meaningful data segments; (3) searching for themes by clustering related codes; (4) reviewing and refining themes against the full dataset; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) writing up the analysis. Themes were developed inductively from the data while also being informed by the theoretical frameworks of multicultural education, Islamic pedagogy, and Vygotskian sociocultural theory.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, four strategies were employed. Credibility was addressed through triangulation of data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) and member checking, in which transcripts and preliminary findings were shared with five of the eight participants for verification. Transferability was enhanced by providing a thick description of the research context and setting. Dependability was addressed through an audit trail of data collection and analysis decisions. Finally, confirmability was strengthened through peer debriefing sessions with two colleagues experienced in qualitative research in Islamic education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Data analysis revealed four interrelated themes reflecting how TK Buah Hati Takengon integrates multicultural Islamic educational values: (1) curriculum integration of multicultural Islamic values; (2) promotion of diversity and tolerance; (3) inclusive pedagogical strategies; and (4) parental involvement.

1. Integration of Multicultural Islamic Educational Values in the Curriculum

Document analysis of the school's curriculum plan and lesson plans revealed systematic incorporation of both Islamic values and local Gayo cultural elements across subject areas. Islamic concepts such as tawhid, honesty (*amanah*), and gratitude (*syukur*) were embedded in daily routines and thematic learning units. Simultaneously, Gayo cultural content, including traditional stories (*cerita rakyat Gayo*), local food traditions, and community cooperative values (*bersebuku*), was integrated as contextual material through which Islamic values were illustrated and reinforced.

During interviews, teachers described their process of selecting and adapting materials to ensure cultural authenticity and Islamic relevance. One teacher explained: "We are meticulous in our choice of books and materials to ensure they authentically portray various cultural practices while also incorporating Islamic teachings. We look for stories and examples from our Gayo tradition that show values like sharing, respecting elders, and helping one another, values that are also deeply Islamic. In this way, children see that being a good Muslim and being a proud Gayo person are not in conflict."

Classroom observations confirmed this integration in practice. Language and communication activities incorporated greetings and phrases in both Indonesian and the Gayo language, with teachers explaining the meaning of Arabic greetings (such as *assalamu'alaikum*) alongside their Gayo equivalents. Weekly planning documents showed dedicated time slots for cultural storytelling activities (*bercerita budaya*), which used Gayo folk narratives as vehicles for teaching Islamic moral lessons. For example, one observed lesson used the traditional Gayo story of a community resolving a dispute through *musyawarah* (deliberation) as the basis for a discussion about the Islamic value of justice (*adl*) and the Qur'anic injunction to resolve conflicts peacefully.

2. Promoting Diversity and Tolerance

Observations and interviews provided extensive evidence of strategies employed to foster diversity, tolerance, and harmonious coexistence. Cultural celebrations were a central feature of the school's calendar. During the observation period, the school organized a "Cultural Diversity Day" in which children wore traditional costumes representing different ethnic groups present in the school community, performed short cultural dances, and brought traditional foods to share with classmates. Teachers used this event as an opportunity to explicitly connect cultural appreciation with Islamic teachings: one teacher led a discussion in which children were asked what the Qur'an says about why God made people different, guiding them toward the concept of ta'aruf (mutual acquaintance and understanding) from Surah Al-Hujurat.



Figure 1. The students involved in cultural celebrations

Classroom observations also documented teachers' use of structured dialogue activities. In one observed session, the teacher facilitated a circle-time discussion in which children were invited to share one tradition or food from their family's background. Children from Gayo, Acehnese, Javanese, and Batak families each participated. The teacher modeled respectful listening and affirmed each child's contribution with Islamic phrases such as Alhamdulillah, reinforcing the message that diversity is a blessing. One teacher articulated the rationale for such activities: "We want children to feel proud of who they are and curious about others. By creating a space where they can share and ask questions, they develop empathy. And we always connect it back to Islamic values that God made us different so that we can know each other, not so that we can look down on each other."

Group activities were deliberately organized to bring together children from different backgrounds. During one observed group project on traditional musical instruments, children were assigned to mixed-background groups and tasked with researching and presenting instruments from different cultures. Children demonstrated enthusiastic engagement, and observations recorded instances of children explaining their own cultural instruments to peers and asking questions about instruments they did not recognize.

3. Inclusive Pedagogical Strategies

Teachers consistently employed inclusive pedagogical strategies designed to accommodate diverse learning styles and ensure the full participation of all children. Observed strategies included the use of visual aids (picture cards depicting cultural and religious concepts), physical props (such as traditional textiles and musical instruments brought into the classroom), and movement-based activities (such as a cooperative game drawn from Gayo children’s folk play). One teacher described her approach: “I know that not all children learn the same way. Some children understand better when they can touch and see something. Others need to move. So, when I want to teach about the value of working together, which is both an Islamic value and part of our Gayo culture, I organize a cooperative game where children must work as a team to complete a task. Afterwards, we sit together and talk about what they felt and what they learned.”

A multicultural food festival observed during the data collection period exemplified the integration of inclusive pedagogy, cultural celebration, and Islamic values. Children brought dishes representing their families’ cultural backgrounds; teachers facilitated sharing and tasting activities, prompting children to express gratitude (*syukur*) for the diversity of foods and to make connections with the Islamic practice of hospitality (*tamu*). Children who appeared initially reluctant to try unfamiliar foods were gently encouraged by peers who explained the significance of the dish in their family’s tradition, illustrating peer-mediated learning consistent with Vygotskian principles.

4. Parental Involvement

Parental involvement emerged as a distinctive and significant feature of TK Buah Hati Takengon’s approach to multicultural Islamic education. Document analysis revealed formal mechanisms for parental engagement, including a “Parenting Day” program held monthly, in which parents were invited to share cultural knowledge, skills, or stories with the class. Interview data confirmed that parents valued and actively participated in these opportunities. One parent described her experience contributing to the program: “I came in to teach the children a traditional Gayo weaving pattern. I also explained to them that in our culture, weaving together is a symbol of unity, different threads making one strong cloth. The teacher connected it to the Islamic idea of brotherhood (*ukhuwah*). It was a beautiful moment. My child was so proud, and the other children were genuinely curious.”



Figure 2. The school organized a parenting day

Teachers and administrators noted that this parental engagement served multiple functions: it enriched the school's cultural knowledge base, strengthened the home-school connection, and modeled for children the value that their school placed on their families' cultural knowledge. The principal described the broader philosophy underlying parental involvement: "We believe that parents are the first teachers, and that the home is the first school. If we want children to grow up respecting diversity and grounded in Islamic values, we cannot do that alone. We need the families to be partners to reinforce at home what we teach at school, and to bring what they know into the school."

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that TK Buah Hati Takengon has developed a coherent and contextually grounded model for integrating multicultural Islamic educational values in early childhood learning. Three dimensions of this model merit discussion in relation to the existing literature: the curriculum integration of Islamic and local cultural values, the role of inclusive pedagogy in fostering diversity and tolerance, and the significance of parental partnership.

The curriculum integration documented in this study extends beyond what previous research has described in general terms as "multicultural content" in Islamic education. Specifically, TK Buah Hati Takengon uses Gayo cultural materials not merely as decorative additions to an otherwise standard Islamic curriculum, but as primary pedagogical vehicles through which Islamic values are taught and reinforced. This approach aligns with Sholeh et al.'s (2025) argument that integrating Islamic values with local culture creates a holistic and contextual curriculum that supports both intellectual development and character formation. It also resonates with Rosyad's (2014) call for Islamic education in Indonesia to engage authentically with the cultural diversity of the archipelago, rather than imposing a culturally decontextualized model of Islamic instruction.

From a sociocultural perspective, Bagherzadeh & Tajeddin (2021) argue that the integration of local cultural knowledge into the curriculum can be understood as an expansion of children's zones of proximal development: by building on the cultural knowledge children bring from their homes and communities, teachers create scaffolding that makes new learning, including new Islamic concepts, more accessible and meaningful. The observation of children explaining their own cultural traditions to peers and making connections between those traditions and Islamic values exemplifies this process of socially mediated learning.

The inclusive pedagogical strategies documented in this study align with the research on differentiated instruction (Day et al., 2016) and the broader literature on culturally responsive teaching. By utilizing visual aids, props, and movement-based activities drawn from both Islamic tradition and Gayo culture, the teachers at TK Buah Hati Takengon ensured that all children could access and engage with the curriculum regardless of their learning style or cultural background. This individualized approach promoted not only academic engagement but also a sense of belonging and self-confidence among the diverse student population, consistent with findings by Korthagen

(2016) and Sánchez et al. (2020) on the relationship between inclusive pedagogy and student well-being.

The active involvement of parents in supporting the integration of multicultural Islamic educational values represents a notable strength of TK Buah Hati Takengon’s approach. Parents served not merely as passive recipients of information but as active contributors of cultural knowledge and expertise. This model of partnership aligns with the dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Mapp & Kuttner, 2013), which emphasizes that effective home-school collaboration requires building the capacity of both families and schools to engage productively with each other. The “Parenting Day” program provides a structured mechanism for this engagement, and the principal’s philosophy of parents as “co-educators” in multicultural Islamic education reflects a deep commitment to this partnership (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

Taken together, the three dimensions of TK Buah Hati Takengon’s approach constitute what may be described as a model of locally grounded multicultural Islamic early childhood education. This model is characterized by: (1) the use of local cultural knowledge as a pedagogical resource for teaching Islamic values; (2) inclusive instructional strategies that celebrate and leverage diversity; and (3) meaningful parental partnership that bridges home and school. This model has potential relevance beyond the Gayo context, as it offers a replicable framework for other early childhood institutions in multicultural Muslim communities seeking to integrate Islamic education with local cultural heritage.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. This study is based on a single case within a specific sociocultural context, and the findings may not be fully transferable to other settings. Future research should expand the scope of inquiry by examining similar integrative approaches in different regional and institutional contexts, including contexts with greater religious diversity, and by using longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impact of multicultural Islamic education on children’s character development, interreligious understanding, and academic outcomes. The perspectives of the children themselves were not directly captured in this study; future research should include child-centered methods (such as participatory observation and child-friendly interviews) to provide a more complete understanding of how young learners experience and respond to multicultural Islamic education.

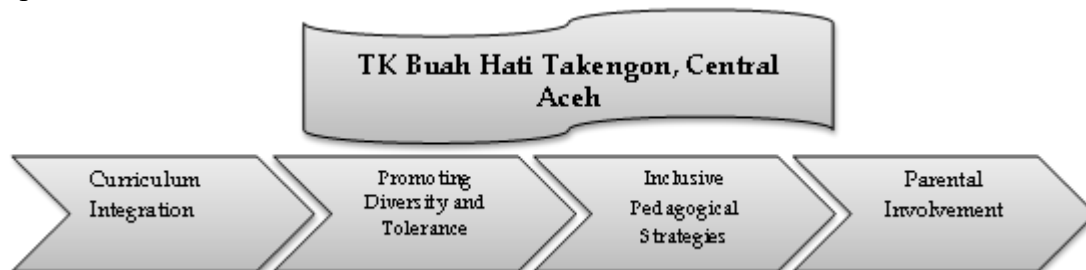


Chart 1. The integration of multicultural Islamic educational values in TK Buah Hati Takengon, Central Aceh

CONCLUSION

This study documents how TK Buah Hati Takengon, a kindergarten in Central Aceh, Indonesia, has developed a model of early childhood education that integrates Islamic values with the multicultural reality of the Gayo community. Through curriculum integration of local cultural materials, inclusive pedagogical strategies, the promotion of diversity and tolerance through structured activities, and meaningful parental partnership, the school fosters an educational environment in which children develop both a grounded Islamic identity and an appreciation for cultural diversity. The scientific contribution of this study lies in its detailed documentation of a locally grounded model of multicultural Islamic early childhood education, one that treats Gayo cultural practices not as a challenge to Islamic education but as a resource for enriching it. This model demonstrates that tawhid-based moral values and local cultural heritage can be harmonized within a coherent pedagogical framework, offering an example of moderate Islamic education (Islam wasathiyah) in practice at the earliest level of formal schooling. For educational policymakers and curriculum developers in Indonesia and other multicultural Muslim societies, the findings highlight the importance of designing Islamic education curricula that are responsive to local cultural contexts, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. For practitioners, the study offers concrete examples of culturally responsive instructional strategies and family engagement practices that can be adapted and implemented in other settings. Future research is encouraged to explore similar integrative models in different regional and institutional contexts, to employ longitudinal designs to assess long-term outcomes, and to center the voices and experiences of young children themselves in understanding how multicultural Islamic education shapes their development and sense of identity.

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