



The Ethics of Ikhtilaf in Islamic Law in Building Social Harmony within Muslim Communities

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ABSTRACT

Ikhtilaf refers to differences of opinion among Islamic scholars in determining legal rulings on *furu'iyah* (subsidiary) issues based on non-definitive evidence. As an integral part of Islamic intellectual tradition, ikhtilaf has shaped the development of Islamic jurisprudence since the era of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions. Unlike previous studies that examine ikhtilaf from isolated perspectives, this study integrates its epistemological, ethical, and contemporary social dimensions while highlighting its relevance to Islamic education, character formation, and religious moderation. Using a library research method with a normative-historical approach, data were collected from the Qur'an, Hadith, classical *Usul al-Fiqh*, fiqh literature, and relevant scholarly works, then analyzed through content analysis. The findings reveal that ikhtilaf arises from differences in hadith transmission, socio-political contexts, legal reasoning, and legal sources. Understanding these causes promotes tolerance, discourages sectarian fanaticism, strengthens respect for scholarly *ijtihad*, and supports the integration of *adab al-ikhtilaf* into Islamic education to preserve Muslim unity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Differences of opinion (ikhtilaf) among scholars are a reality that has persisted from the time of the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) to the present day¹. Differences of opinion (ikhtilaf) among people including among religious scholars are neither a new phenomenon nor contrary to the will of Allah SWT. The Qur'an itself explains that this diversity of views is part of sunnatullah (Allah's established order) regarding human life, as affirmed in QS. Hud (11: 118) :

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَجَعَلَ النَّاسَ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ^٢

Translation: If your Lord had willed, He would have certainly made humanity a single community. However, they continue to differ (in matters of religion).

In Surah Hud, verse 118, the verse begins with a conditional particle that functions differently from other conditional particles such as in, idzma, imma, and others. According to Arabic grammatical rules, the conditional particle law describes a condition regarding an action in the past that did not or could not come to pass for a specific reason. This rule functions similarly to the English concept of a "wish" regarding the past, implying an impossibility of occurrence. In other words, the verse indicates the impossibility of a ummatan wahidah (a single, unified, and harmonious community) because, in reality, humanity exhibits striking and highly visible diversity across various parts of the world. Thus, this unavoidable diversity, along with differing traditions and cultures, will persist until the end of time.²

This phenomenon is not something to be avoided or feared, rather, it is part of the intellectual dynamics within the rich and diverse tradition of Islamic scholarship. In Islamic history, we observe how the imams of the various major schools of thought such as Imam Malik, Imam Shafi'i, Imam Abu Hanifah, and Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal often held differing opinions on various legal issues; yet, these differences did not prevent them from respecting one another and acknowledging the depth of each other's knowledge³. Those differences actually enrich the body of Islamic legal thought and facilitate the observance of Sharia for the Muslim community. This capacity to accommodate differing methodologies while remaining grounded in the objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al-Shariah) reflects the broader Islamic scholarly tradition of contextual ijtihad, in which religious knowledge is continuously reinterpreted to remain relevant to contemporary intellectual and communicative contexts⁴.

In the context of Indonesia's pluralistic modern society, an understanding of ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement) becomes highly relevant⁵. Muslims need to understand that differences of opinion regarding matters of furu'iyah (subsidiary issues) are natural and need not be a source of division. On the contrary, such differences when grounded in valid evidence and methodology can serve as a

¹ Yusuf al-Qaradhawi, *Al-Shahwah Al-Islamiyyah Bayna Al-Ikhtilaf Al-Masyru' Wa Al-Tafarruq Al-Madzmum*, Cetakan UI (Kairo: Dār al-Syurūq, 2005).

² Faridatun Nisa and Laily Liddini, "Fenomena Hallyu Wave Dalam Sudut Pandang Islam (Kajian Hermeneutis Abdullah Saeed Terhadap Qs. Hud [11]: 118)," *Mua'sarah: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 3, no. 2 (2021): h. 23, <https://doi.org/10.18592/msr.v4i1.6554>.

³ Ibnu Rusyd, *Bidayat Al-Mujtahid Wa Nihayat Al-Muqtashid* (Kairo: Dar al-Hadits, 2004), 14, <https://archive.org/details/BidayatAl-mujtahidTheDistinguishedJuristsPrimer>.

⁴ Eko Prayetno and others, "Integrating Math Values in Da'wah: Fiqh and Maqasid Al-Shariah in the Digital Era," *Episteme: Jurnal Kajian Mahasiswa* 2, no. 1 (April 2026): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.62448/episteme.v2i1.324>.

⁵ Suryan A Jamrah, "Ikhtilaf Dan Etika Perbedaan Dalam Islam," *TOLERANSI: Media Ilmiah Komunikasi Umat Beragama* 6, no. 2 (December 2014): 223–40, <https://doi.org/10.24014/trs.v6i2.908>.

valuable intellectual asset for the development of Islamic thought. Unfortunately, in the practice of daily religious life, many Muslims approach the issue of ikhtilaf (differences of opinion among scholars) disproportionately and display excessive fanaticism toward a specific madhhab (school of thought), even labeling differing views as heresy, while others disregard the opinions of all scholars altogether under the pretext of freedom of thought⁶. Both of these extreme attitudes are equally detrimental to the development of moderate Islam, which serves as a mercy to all creation (rahmatan lil 'alamin).

Studies on ikhtilaf have been widely conducted by previous researchers. Bakry examined the development of tolerant character in the problem of ikhtilaf among fiqh schools, highlighting how differences in the sources of law (mashdar al-ahkam) and in the ways of understanding the text (nash) underlie the emergence of ikhtilaf.⁷ Meanwhile, Al-Asror elaborated six factors giving rise to ikhtilaf among mujtahid covering semantic, narrational, epistemological, methodological (qawa'id ushuliyah), qiyas, and tarjih factors as well as its philosophical dimension and the appropriate ways of responding to it.⁸ From these studies, it is evident that discussions of ikhtilaf still tend to focus on a single aspect (either character formation or causal factors), while an integration of causes, the purpose of understanding those causes, wisdom, social implications, and the proper attitude toward ikhtilaf within one comprehensive analytical framework remains rarely examined. Similarly, studies addressing the historical contribution of madhhab differences to the development of Islamic law, and studies examining how ikhtilaf is encountered in everyday religious life, tend to remain descriptive: they document existing differences without systematically connecting these findings to the practical needs of Islamic religious education, character formation, or community empowerment programs aimed at strengthening religious moderation (wasathiyah). It is this gap namely, the absence of a framework that links the epistemological understanding of ikhtilaf to concrete educational and characterbuilding objectives that the present study seeks to address.

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to integrate the epistemological dimension (the causes and methodology of ikhtilaf), the ethical dimension (proper conduct in disagreement), and the contemporary social dimension (its relevance to Indonesia's pluralistic society) into a single, unified discussion. This article is thus expected to offer a scientific contribution in the form of a more comprehensive framework for understanding ikhtilaf, while also serving as a conceptual reference for strengthening moderate religious attitudes (wasathiyah) within a plural Muslim society. Beyond its contribution to Islamic legal studies, this integrated framework is intended to be directly usable in Islamic religious education for example, in designing fiqh instruction and character-building curricula that teach students to disagree respectfully and in community empowerment programs that seek to prevent sectarian fanaticism at the grassroots level. This article examines ikhtilaf in depth in Islamic law, including: the meaning of ikhtilaf, the causes of ikhtilaf, the purpose of knowing the causes of ikhtilaf, the wisdom of ikhtilaf and its implications in people's lives, as well as the attitude that should be taken in dealing with ikhtilaf.

⁶ Luluatul Badriyyah and Ashif Az Zafi, "Perbedaan Mazhab Empat Imam Besar ({Hanafi}, {Maliki}, {Syafi'i}, Dan {Hambali}) Dalam Paradigma Hukum Fikih," *Al-Muaddib: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial Dan Keislaman* 5, no. 1 (May 2020): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.31604/muaddib.v5i1.65-79>.

⁷ Muammar Bakry, "Pengembangan Karakter Toleran dalam Problematika Ikhtilaf Mazhab Fikih," *Al-Ulum: Jurnal Studi Islam* 14, no. 1 (2014): h. 171–188.

⁸ Mahdum Kholit Al-Asror, "Ikhtilaf Mujtahid: Analisis Faktor, Filosofis dan Cara Menyikapi," *Minhaj: Jurnal Ilmu Syariah* 5, no. 1 (2024): 123–142, <https://doi.org/10.52431/minhaj.v5i1.2368>.

2. METHODS

This study is a descriptive analytical library research⁹. The approach employed is a normative-historical one, involving the study of primary religious texts (the Qur'an and Hadith) as well as classical and contemporary literature in the fields of *usul al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and the history of Islamic law. Operationally, the normative dimension of this approach was applied by reading each text against the *qat'i/zhanni* (definitive/probabilistic) framework used in *usul al-fiqh*, while the historical dimension was applied by tracing how a given ruling or opinion developed across the successive periods of the Companions, the founding Imams of the four *madhahib*, and contemporary scholarship, so that a given instance of *ikhtilaf* could be situated both within its normative textual basis and within the historical circumstances that shaped it.

Research Procedure. The research was conducted through four systematic stages: (1) identification, mapping key classical and contemporary texts discussing *ikhtilāf* among the four Sunni *madhāhib*; (2) collection, compiling primary and secondary sources relevant to the research questions, following standard documentation techniques for library-based research. Sources were selected using the following criteria: (a) authoritative standing within *usul al-fiqh* and *fiqh* comparative literature (canonical works such as Al-Mustasfa and Al-Burhan, and classical *madhhab* references), (b) direct relevance to the four Sunni *madhahib*'s treatment of *ikhtilaf*, and (c) for secondary sources, publication in peer-reviewed journals within the last ten years, with older classical primary texts exempted from the recency criterion given their foundational status; (3) analysis, applying content analysis to identify patterns of reasoning across texts, in line with qualitative library-study procedures; and (4) interpretation, contextualizing findings through a hermeneutic reading to draw conclusions relevant to contemporary Islamic legal discourse.¹⁰ The primary data sources for this study include classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) texts such as Al-Ghazali's *Al-Mustaṣfā* and Al-Juwaynī's *Al-Burhān* as well as works on comparative *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) across schools of thought. Meanwhile, secondary sources comprise journal articles, contemporary textbooks on Islamic law, and relevant research findings addressing the theme of *ikhtilāf* (scholarly disagreement).

Unit of Analysis. The unit of analysis in this study is the legal reasoning statement each argument, method of derivation, or juristic opinion regarding *ikhtilāf* found within the texts rather than the text or author as a whole. **Data Analysis.** Data analysis was conducted using the content analysis method on the texts under study, involving three concrete stages: (1) data reduction, in which relevant passages on the causes, purposes, wisdom, and proper attitudes toward *ikhtilaf* were coded and extracted from each source; (2) data display, in which coded passages were grouped into thematic categories (external causes, internal causes, objectives, wisdom, and *adab al-ikhtilaf*) to allow cross-source comparison; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification, in which patterns across categories were checked against the primary texts to confirm they were not the result of selective reading. This was followed by a hermeneutic interpretation, in which the reduced and displayed data were re-read within their normative-historical context (see Research Procedure above) to gain a comprehensive and contextual understanding of *ikhtilaf* (divergence of opinion) in Islamic law.¹¹ To maintain the accuracy and validity of interpretation (trustworthiness), this study applied source triangulation comparing classical primary texts, comparative *fiqh* literature, and contemporary secondary sources on the same

⁹ Milya Sari and Asmendri, "Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research) Dalam Penelitian Pendidikan IPA," *NATURAL SCIENCE: Jurnal Penelitian Bidang IPA Dan Pendidikan IPA* 6, no. 1 (2020): 41–53, <https://doi.org/10.15548/nsc.v6i1.1555>.

¹⁰ Miza Nina Adlini et al., "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka," *Edumaspul: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2022): 974–80, <https://doi.org/10.33487/edumaspul.v6i1.3394>.

¹¹ Adlini et al.

point of ikhtilaf to check for convergence and peer debriefing, in which preliminary coding and interpretation were discussed with scholars specializing in uṣūl al-fiqh.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Etymologically, the word ikhtilaf (اختلاف) derives from the root khalafa (خلف), which signifies replacing, contravening, or differing. In *Lisan al-Arab*, Ibn Manzur notes that the word carries the fundamental meaning of "not uniting" or "lacking consensus" referring to a state where two things do not proceed in the same direction.¹² Etymologically, the three terms ikhtilaf, khilaf, and khilafiyah derive from the same Arabic root. Ikhtilaf stems from the verb khalafa-yakhluḥu-khالفan/khilafatan, linguistically, it signifies a difference of opinion or thought, or a distinction in color or type, carrying a connotation of variation or change. Terminologically, however, it refers to a difference of opinion among scholars specifically jurists regarding a subsidiary matter (furu') for which there is no explicit textual evidence in the Qur'an.¹³

In terms of terminology, ikhtilaf within the context of Islamic law (fiqh) has several definitions according to scholars. Al-Jurjani, in the book *At-Ta'rifat*, defines ikhtilaf as a disagreement between two or more individuals regarding a specific issue, wherein each party upholds their own opinion based on specific arguments¹⁴. Meanwhile, Ibn Rushd, in *Bidayat al-Mujtahid*, states that ikhtilaf refers to differences of opinion among mujtahid's regarding legal issues for which there is no nas (scriptural text) that is sharih (explicit) and qat'i (definitive)¹⁵. Read side by side, the two definitions are complementary rather than competing: Al-Jurjani's formulation centers on the interpersonal structure of ikhtilaf each party holding an evidenced opinion while Ibn Rushd's formulation adds the epistemic boundary condition under which that structure is legitimate, namely the absence of a sharih and qat'i nas. Taken together they indicate that, for a disagreement to count as ikhtilaf in the technical sense used in this study rather than mere khilaf, it must satisfy both conditions simultaneously: reasoned plurality of opinion, and textual indeterminacy.

Scholars of Usul (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) distinguish between ikhtilaf and khilaf. Generally, ikhtilaf refers to a difference of opinion in which each party possesses strong evidence and arguments, whereas ikhilaf refers more to a conflict in which one party lacks a solid basis.¹⁶ Thus, it can be concluded that ikhtilaf refers to a difference of opinion derived from the root word khalafa, which linguistically signifies being different or not in alignment. In the terminology of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), ikhtilaf is understood as a divergence of views among scholars or mujtahid s regarding issues of Islamic law specifically subsidiary matters (furu') that lack definitive (qath'i) evidence from the Quran and Hadith. Such differences arise from variations in the methods of legal deduction (istinbat), the interpretation of evidence, and the legal considerations employed by each mujtahid. Furthermore, scholars distinguish between ikhtilaf and khilaf, ikhtilaf denotes a difference supported by strong arguments from all parties involved, whereas khilaf tends to imply a conflict in which one of the opinions lacks a solid foundation. This ikhtilaf/khilaf distinction is analytically consequential rather than merely lexical: it functions as a filter that determines which disagreements this study treats as legitimate objects of the ethics of disagreement (adab al-ikhtilaf) developed in section 3.4. A dispute

¹² Ibnu Manzur, *Lisan Al-Arab*, vol. 9 (Beirut: Dar Shadir, 1955).

¹³ H. Minhajuddin, *Ikhtilaf Ulama Suni Dan Pengaruhnya Terhadap Perkembangan Fikih Islam (Abad Dua Dan Tiga Hijriah)* (Makassar: Alauddin Press, 2012).

¹⁴ Ali ibn Muhammad al-Jurjani, *Al-Ta'rifat* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1983).

¹⁵ Rusyd, *Bidayat Al-Mujtahid Wa Nihayat Al-Muqtashid*.

¹⁶ Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islami Wa Adillatuhu*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2010), <https://archive.org/details/dr.-wahbah-al-zuhaili-al-fiqh-al-islami-wa-adillatuhu-pdf-bahasa>.

lacking evidentiary grounding on either side is *khilaf* and calls for correction, not tolerance; only disputes meeting the *ikhtilaf* threshold both parties reasoned, and the underlying text non-definitive warrant the respectful coexistence of opinions this article argues for.

3.1. Causes of *Ikhtilaf*

In his book, M. Ali Hasan explains that the causes of *ikhtilaf* (differences of opinion) are divided into two categories: external causes and internal causes¹⁷:

1. External Causes

- a. Differences in the number and types of hadiths possessed by mujtahids. Each mujtahid had access to a different set of hadiths. This was because the Companions of the Messenger of Allah were scattered across various regions, meaning not all scholars could obtain hadiths from the same sources. Furthermore, the degree of closeness each Companion had with the Messenger of Allah also influenced the volume of hadiths they narrated.
- b. Lack of attention to the context of the hadith: Some scholars and Muslims do not always consider the background such as whether a statement by the Messenger was intended for the general public or addressed to a specific individual when a saying was delivered. Similarly, a command from the Prophet does not necessarily apply to every circumstance, as it may have been prescribed only for a specific situation.
- c. Differences in understanding the intent behind the Prophet's answers and commands. Some scholars do not fully grasp the Messenger of Allah's objective when answering questions or issuing commands. Yet, a particular answer might be appropriate for a specific individual's situation, but not necessarily applicable to everyone or every circumstance.
- d. The influence of the assumption that *ijma'* (consensus) exists: Some scholars accept the views of earlier scholars who assumed that consensus had been reached, even though, in reality, differences of opinion persisted. For instance, regarding the ruling on raising one's hands during *takbirat al-ihram* a practice some scholars consider to be a unanimously agreed-upon *Sunnah*, while others hold a different view.
- e. Excessive emphasis on *sunnah* practices: Some scholars place such strong emphasis on the performance of *sunnah* practices that the general public comes to regard them as obligatory. Consequently, the perception arises that omitting these practices constitutes a sin.
- f. The influence of political differences and schools of thought. Divergent political views have played a role in shaping the development of Islamic legal thought. Groups such as the Kharijites, Shia, Ahlus *Sunnah wal Jama'ah*, and Mu'tazila held differing perspectives regarding politics, creed, acts of worship, and jurisprudence. At times, an opinion was even rejected simply because it originated from another group, without regard for the strength of the argument itself.

2. Internal Causes

- a. Differences in assessing the status of Hadith: Hadiths of the Messenger of Allah were transmitted through various chains of narration, leading to instances where differences or even contradictions arise between reports. Disparities in the assessment of narrator credibility and the degree of authenticity result in scholars differing on whether to use them as a basis for legal rulings.
- b. Differences in the use of legal sources. Islamic scholars do not always align in their application of Islamic legal sources, leading to differences of opinion. Regarding the use of hadith, all mujtahids (jurists capable of independent legal reasoning) agree that hadith constitutes a source of Islamic

¹⁷ M. Ali Hasan, *Perbandingan Mazhab* (Jakarta: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada, 2002).

law. However, they differ in their assessment of hadith quality specifically concerning authenticity and the level of trustworthiness attributed to the narrators. Regarding the use of *ijma'* (consensus), an example can be found in the issue of a triple divorce pronounced in a single instance. The majority of scholars hold the view that such a pronouncement constitutes three divorces, based on the consensus established during the caliphate of Umar. Conversely, some scholars argue that it counts as only one divorce, relying on the practice observed during the eras of the Prophet and Caliph Abu Bakar.

- c. The difference in the use of *istihsan* from the Hanafi School makes *istihsan* a method of determining law, while the Syafi'i School does not accept it as a postulate. For example, women who are menstruating according to the Hanafi School are allowed to read the Koran, whereas according to the Syafi'i School it is not allowed because it is analogous to someone who is *junub*.
- d. Differences in the application of *maslahah murlah* *Maslahah murlah* is a method of determining law that takes into account the public benefit even though it is not explicitly mentioned in the text. For example, some scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki and Shafi'i schools of thought allow the death penalty to be imposed on a group of people who collectively kill one person in order to maintain the public good and prevent similar crimes. Meanwhile, the Hambali School does not allow it because it is deemed not to fulfill the principle of balance in punishment.
- e. Differences in the application of '*urf*'. '*Urf* refers to customs or traditions prevalent within a society, whether in the form of speech or actions. Differences in the acceptance and utilization of '*urf* as a basis for legal consideration contribute to the emergence of differing opinions among Islamic scholars.

According to this study, it is worth noting that M. Ali Hasan's external/internal division converges with, rather than duplicates, Al-Asror's six-factor typology discussed in the Introduction: where Al-Asror analyzes causation at the level of an individual mujtahid's reasoning (semantic, narrational, epistemological, methodological, *qiyas*, and *tarjih* factors), M. Ali Hasan's framework captures largely the same phenomena at the level of the transmission environment (unequal access to hadith, socio-political context) versus the jurist's own interpretive choices (*istihsan*, *maslahah mursalah*, '*urf*). The two typologies are therefore complementary lenses on the same underlying causes, rather than competing classifications, and this study's contribution lies in showing how they can be read together as a single external-internal structure.

Read this way, these two categories of causes demonstrate that *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement) is not the product of negligence but rather a logical consequence of two structural conditions: unequal access to texts among early generations (an external factor), and legitimate methodological diversity within *usul al-fiqh* such as *istihsan*, *maslahah mursalah*, and '*urf* (internal factors). The cases of *istihsan* and *maslahah mursalah* specifically illustrate the interaction between these factors: when an explicit scriptural text is unavailable for a given case, it is the specific methodological choice made by each *madhhab* (school of thought) regarding the accommodation of supplementary legal sources that determines the differing outcomes of *ijtihad*. Because *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement) is structural arising from a combination of limited historical data and a diversity of equally valid *usul* (foundational) methodologies the resulting differences of opinion deserve respect, provided the arguments remain consistent with the framework of the respective *madhhab* (school of thought). This reading departs from M. Ali Hasan's original external/internal typology in one respect: whereas Hasan presents the two categories as a flat list of eight discrete factors, the case of *istihsan* and *maslahah mursalah* discussed above shows that internal, methodological causes are not independent of external, historical ones they are the tool each *madhhab* uses to compensate for the very gaps in textual evidence that external causes

create.¹⁸ Reading the two categories together, rather than as parallel lists, is what allows the causal analysis to connect to the discussion of purposes and wisdom that follows.

3.2. *The purpose of knowing the causes of Ikhtilaf*

Scholars of *usul al-fiqh* emphasize several key objectives of understanding the causes of this *ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion):

- a. Understanding the Position of an Opinion Proportionally: By knowing the causes of *ikhtilaf*, an Islamic law reviewer can assess the weight and strength of an opinion more objectively¹⁹. He is able to understand why one scholar chooses a particular opinion and why another chooses a different one, without falling prey to blind fanaticism for any single view.
- b. Developing Ijtihad Capabilities: Understanding the causes of *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement) equips aspiring mujtahids with comprehensive methodological insight. By studying the various approaches and methods employed by early Imams, they can develop more mature and well-grounded *ijtihad* capabilities²⁰.
- c. Fostering an Attitude of Tolerance and Mutual Respect: When an individual understands that *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement) stems from legitimate factors such as differing interpretations of texts or varying methods of *ijtihad* it becomes easier for them to cultivate an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect toward differing viewpoints²¹.
- d. Avoiding Blind Imitation and Sectarian Fanaticism: A profound understanding of the reasons for scholarly disagreement (*ikhtilaf*) helps one avoid blind imitation whereby one follows a single opinion without knowledge of the supporting evidence and arguments²².

According to these findings, the four objectives do not constitute a disjointed list but rather a cause-and-effect sequence: a proportional understanding (the first objective) is a prerequisite for the capacity for mature *ijtihad* (the second objective), which in turn fosters a tolerant attitude (the third objective) and ultimately prevents blind imitation (the fourth objective). In the context of a pluralistic society like Indonesia, this understanding serves as a counterbalance between sectarian fanaticism on the one hand and the dismissal of scholarly opinion in the name of freedom of thought on the other—as touched upon in the Introduction. Understanding the causes of *ikhtilaf* (scholarly disagreement) is a prerequisite for a mature religious attitude: one that is balanced in evaluating opinions, capable of *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning), tolerant, and free from blind fanaticism.

3.3 *The Wisdom Behind Disagreement and Its Implications*

a. *The Wisdom Behind Differences of Opinion*

Ikhtilaf can be classified into two types: the first type (*ikhtilaf tanawwu'*) contains great wisdom and is a blessing for the people, while the second type (*ikhtilaf tadhah*) is a despicable form of

¹⁸ M. Ali Hasan, *Perbandingan Mazhab* (Jakarta: PT. RajaGrafindo Persada, 2002).

¹⁹ Kholidah, "Akar Ikhtilaf Dalam Pemikiran Hukum Islam Dan Cara Mensikapi Perbedaan," *Yurisprudencia: Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi* 9, no. 2 (2023), <https://jurnal.uinsyahada.ac.id/index.php/yurisprudencia/article/view/9450>.

²⁰ Kholidah, "MENGULAS AKAR IKHTILAF DALAM PEMIKIRAN HUKUM ISLAM DAN MEMBANGUN SIKAP TOLERANSI," *Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi* 9, no. 2 (2023): 330.

²¹ Jamrah, "Ikhtilaf Dan Etika Perbedaan Dalam Islam."

²² Faisal, "Fiqh Ikhtilaf Dalam Kehidupan Beragama," *Jurnal Al-Qadha: Jurnal Hukum Islam Dan Perundang-Undangan* 6, no. 2 (2019): 1–15, <https://journal.iainlangsa.ac.id/index.php/qadha>.

contradiction that must be avoided. Some lessons from this commendable endeavor include:

1. Islamic Intellectual Heritage: Ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement) has yielded a remarkably rich treasury of Islamic knowledge. Various works on comparative jurisprudence across schools of thought (madhahib), treatises on scholarly differences, and encyclopedias of jurisprudence are products of this constructive tradition of ikhtilaf²³.
2. Fostering Dynamic Thinking and Intellectual Creativity: The tradition of ikhtilaf encourages scholars to engage in continuous creative thinking and to develop stronger arguments²⁴. This, in turn, fostered intellectual progress within the Islamic scholarly tradition.
3. Fostering a Mature Attitude Toward Differences: The tradition of ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement) teaches Muslims to adopt a mature approach when encountering differences. They are trained to engage in scholarly discourse, respect differing opinions, and avoid hastily declaring fellow Muslims disbelievers or assigning blame to them over matters subject to ijihad (independent legal reasoning)²⁵.

These three forms of wisdom are not independent benefits but a chain: intellectual heritage (a) accumulates only because dynamic thinking (b) is permitted, and dynamic thinking is only sustainable within a community if a mature attitude toward differences (c) restrains it from collapsing into division. This is where the present analysis moves beyond al-Zuhaili's classification of ikhtilaf tanawwu' versus ikhtilaf tadhah²⁶: whether a given ikhtilaf ends up as tanawwu' (a blessing) or tadhah (a despicable rupture) is not fixed by the disagreement's origin but is determined by whether the attitude in point (c) is actually practiced, which is why section 3.4 below treats adab al-ikhtilaf as the decisive, rather than a merely supplementary, variable.

Read together, these three forms of wisdom are not a random list but trace a single progression: the preservation of intellectual heritage (a collective, textual outcome) creates the raw material from which dynamic thinking (an individual, cognitive outcome) draws, which in turn is what makes a mature attitude toward differences (a behavioral, character outcome) possible. This progression is significant because it clarifies a point left implicit in Bakry's account of tolerant-character formation discussed in the Introduction: character does not follow directly from disagreement itself, but from disagreement mediated by an intact intellectual tradition and habits of critical reasoning. Removing either of the first two forms of wisdom would leave the third without a foundation, which is one reason unexamined disagreement tends to produce fanaticism rather than tolerance.

b. Implications of Ikhtilaf in Community Life

1. Providing alternative legal solutions for various complex contemporary issues
2. Encouraging Muslims to be more active in studying and understanding their religious teachings
3. The potential for division within the Muslim community if differences of opinion (ikhtilaf) are approached with fanaticism and exclusivity
4. Confusion among the general public, who lack the capacity to evaluate the arguments presented by each side
5. The exploitation of differences of opinion by certain groups for political and power-related

²³ Vinda Nurul Hidayatul Aiman and Achmad Mukhsin, "Perbedaan Dan Kontribusi Mazhab Fikih Dalam Perkembangan Hukum Islam," *Al-Tarbiyah: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 2 (2025): 10–21, <https://doi.org/10.59059/al-tarbiyah.v3i2.2149>.

²⁴ Aiman and Mukhsin.

²⁵ Faisal, "Fiqh Ikhtilaf Dalam Kehidupan Beragama."

²⁶ Wahbah al-Zuhaili, *Al-Fiqh Al-Islami Wa Adillatuhu*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 2010).

interests²⁷.

According to the findings of this study, ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement) arising from legitimate methodological differences can yield benefits or lead to division, depending on how the community responds to it. This distinction is crucial: it is not the disagreement itself that is problematic, but rather the lack of proper etiquette in responding to it. To maximize benefits and minimize risks, a collective awareness is required among scholars and the public to consistently prioritize the etiquette of disagreement (adab al-ikhtilaf) and uphold the dignity of Islamic brotherhood above existing differences. Ikhtilaf (scholarly disagreement) holds a dual potential: it can serve as a mercy that enriches the intellectual tradition, or as a catalyst for division depending on the attitude adopted by the community, which is the focus of the next section.

3.4 Attitude in Facing Ikhtilaf

Scholars have formulated several ideal attitudes that a Muslim should adopt when dealing with differences of opinion (ikhtilaf).

- a. Prioritizing Adab al-Ikhtilaf (Etiquette regarding differences of opinion). The primary and most fundamental attitude is to maintain proper etiquette when dealing with differing opinions. This entails: speaking politely and respectfully when expressing one's views; refraining from belittling or disparaging the opinions of others; listening carefully to the other party's arguments before responding; and always assuming the best regarding the intentions and motivations of those who hold a different view²⁸.
- b. Distinguishing between qath'i (definitive) and zhanni (probabilistic) matters. A wise approach requires one to distinguish between issues that are qath'i (certain) and those that are zhanni (based on interpretation or conjecture). Regarding qath'i matters such as the obligation of prayer, fasting during Ramadan, and the prohibition of adultery there is no room for disagreement, and all Muslims are required to be in accord. However, regarding zhanni matters that are subject to ijtiḥad (independent legal reasoning), disagreement is natural and does not warrant heated debate²⁹.
- c. Respecting the Results of the Ulama's Ijtiḥad. Every opinion expressed by mu'tabar (acknowledged) mujtahid scholars deserves respect, even if we do not agree with it. The scholars have been serious in their ijtiḥad and poured all their scientific abilities. Respecting the results of their ijtiḥad is part of respecting the Islamic scientific tradition itself³⁰.
- d. Adopting the Opinion with the Strongest Argumentation (Tarjih). For those possessing sufficient scholarly capacity, the appropriate approach is to engage in tarjih that is, weighing the various existing opinions and selecting the one supported by the strongest evidence and argumentation³¹. Laypeople who lack the capacity to conduct tarjih (independent legal reasoning to determine the preferred ruling) themselves are advised to follow trusted scholars or fatwa institutions, without becoming fanatically attached to any single madhhab (school of thought).

These four attitudes are not a menu of equally applicable options but a hierarchy keyed to the individual's competence: the first attitude (adab) is obligatory for every Muslim regardless of scholarly capacity, the second (qath'i/zhanni) requires only enough literacy to recognize a category, the third

²⁷ Kholidah, "Akar Ikhtilaf Dalam Pemikiran Hukum Islam Dan Cara Mensikapi Perbedaan."

²⁸ Jamrah, "Ikhtilaf Dan Etika Perbedaan Dalam Islam."

²⁹ Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilm Ushul Al-Fiqh* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1956).

³⁰ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I'lam Al-Muwaqqi'in 'an Rabb Al-'Alamin*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1991).

³¹ Saif al-Din Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Abi Ali ibn Muhammad al-Amidi, *Al-Ihkam Fi Ushul Al-Ahkam*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985).

(respecting *ijtihad*) requires no independent legal skill at all, while the fourth (*tarjih*) is reserved for those with the technical capacity to weigh evidence, with laypeople directed instead to *taqlid* of trusted scholars. Reading the four together in this order, rather than as an unordered list as in Khallaf's original formulation³², clarifies why *adab al-ikhtilaf* functions as the baseline attitude introduced in section 3.3 above, rather than merely one item alongside the other three.

When faced with *ikhtilaf* (differences of opinion), a Muslim is expected to act wisely by upholding proper etiquette regarding such differences, distinguishing between matters that are definitive (*qath'i*) and those that are open to interpretation (*zhanni*), respecting the *ijtihad* (scholarly reasoning) of religious scholars, and following the opinion supported by the strongest arguments commensurate with their own level of knowledge. These attitudes demonstrate that differences of opinion in Islam are not grounds for hostility; rather, they represent a form of intellectual richness that should be approached with mutual respect and tolerance, while maintaining the unity of the Ummah (the Muslim community).

3.5. Critical Synthesis and Contemporary Relevance for Islamic Education and Religious Moderation

The findings above go beyond a mere restatement of classical doctrine; read against the studies cited in the Introduction, they show that this study's contribution is not simply an additional inventory of causes and wisdom, but a demonstration of how these elements interlock. Bakry's account of *ikhtilaf* as a matter of character formation and Al-Asror's six-factor causal taxonomy, discussed separately in the earlier literature, are here shown to be two stages of a single process: the causal analysis in section 3.1 explains why *ikhtilaf* arises, while the discussion of its purposes and wisdom in sections 3.2 and 3.3 explains why that same disagreement, once understood, produces the tolerant character these earlier studies describe as an isolated outcome. In this respect, understanding causation is not merely descriptive knowledge but the epistemic precondition for the ethical and social outcomes that previous research has documented without explaining their origin.

This integrated framework has concrete contemporary applications. In Islamic religious education, the causes-purposes-wisdom sequence developed here can structure a *fiqh muqaran* (comparative *fiqh*) module in which students first learn why the four *madhahib* differ before being asked to evaluate their arguments, rather than memorizing the differences as isolated facts. For character development, the ethics of disagreement (*adab al-ikhtilaf*) identified in section 3.4 offers concrete behavioral markers such as distinguishing *qath'i* from *zhanni* matters and practicing *tarjih* rather than blind imitation that can be built into character education indicators, comparable to how schools already assess other civic and religious attitudes. For religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) programs³³, the same framework equips facilitators of interfaith and intra faith dialogue, including moderators of online religious discourse³⁴, with a structured way to explain why credible scholars disagree, which helps to defuse the two extremes of sectarian fanaticism and wholesale rejection of scholarly authority discussed in the Introduction.

Table 1 summarizes this analytical framework and translates each dimension into a corresponding educational or practical application, so that the conceptual contribution of this study can be more readily traced to its use in Islamic education, character development, and community empowerment.

³² Abdul Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilm Ushul Al-Fiqh* (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1956).

³³ Zuly Qodir, "Islam Wasathiyah Dan Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 18, no. 2 (2021): 125–38, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jpai.2021.18.2.8012>.

³⁴ Nurhidayah, "Literasi Keagamaan Di Era Digital: Tantangan Pendidikan Islam Dalam Membangun Moderasi Beragama," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer* 7, no. 1 (2023): 45–56, <https://doi.org/10.25029/jpik.v7i1.3478>.

Table 1. Analytical framework linking the epistemological, purposive, axiological, and ethical dimensions of ikhtilaf to their applications in Islamic education, character development, and religious moderation.

Analytical Dimension	Key Elements from This Study	Educational / Practical Application
Epistemological (Causes)	External causes (hadith transmission, socio-political context) and internal causes (istinbat methods, use of istihsan, maslahah mursalah, 'urf)	Basis for comparative fiqh (fiqh muqaran) modules that teach why madhahib differ before evaluating their arguments
Purposive (Objectives of understanding ikhtilaf)	Proportional evaluation of opinions, capacity for mature ijihad, tolerance, avoidance of blind imitation	Indicators for character education curricula assessing critical and tolerant religious reasoning
Axiological (Wisdom and social implications)	Preservation of intellectual heritage, dynamic scholarship, alternative legal solutions, prevention of sectarian division	Content for religious moderation (wasathiyyah) training and community empowerment programs
Ethical (Adab al-ikhtilaf)	Distinguishing qath'i from zhanni matters, respecting ijihad, practicing tarjih, avoiding fanaticism	Behavioral guidelines for interfaith/intra faith dialogue facilitators and online religious discourse moderators

4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that ikhtilaf (differences of opinion) among Islamic scholars is not a deviation from religious teaching but a manifestation of Allah's sunnatullah, as affirmed in QS. Hud (11): 118, and a natural consequence of the diverse methodologies (manahij al-istinbath) employed by mujtahid in deriving legal rulings from the Qur'an and Hadith. More importantly, this study demonstrates that the causes, purposes, wisdom, and ethics of ikhtilaf are not separate topics but a single interlocking sequence: understanding why disagreement arises is the epistemic precondition for the tolerant, ijihad-capable character that earlier studies treated as an isolated outcome, and this sequence in turn generates concrete ethical guidance (adab al-ikhtilaf) for how Muslims should conduct themselves when opinions diverge.

The scientific contribution of this study therefore lies not only in advancing Islamic legal scholarship on ikhtilaf, but equally in Islamic education: it converts an integrated causes-purposes-wisdom-ethics framework, previously scattered across studies that examined only one dimension at a time (as discussed in the Introduction and synthesized in section 3.5), into a structure that can be taught rather than merely described. In practical terms, this means the framework can inform the design of comparative fiqh (fiqh muqaran) curricula that teach the reasoning behind madhhab differences rather than the differences alone; character-education indicators built around the adab al-ikhtilaf markers identified in this study, namely distinguishing qath'i from zhanni matters, practicing tarjih, and avoiding blind imitation; and religious moderation (wasathiyyah) training that equips community and da'wah facilitators to explain, rather than merely discourage, disagreement among credible scholars, thereby countering both rigid sectarian fanaticism and the wholesale rejection of scholarly authority described in the Introduction. Given that this study is limited to a normative-historical analysis of classical and contemporary usul al-fiqh literature, future research is recommended to explore the practical application of adab al-ikhtilaf (ethics of disagreement) through empirical or field-based approaches for instance, examining how contemporary religious institutions, educational settings, or online religious discourse manage differences of opinion in practice, and evaluating whether the fiqh muqaran and character-education applications proposed in Table 1 measurably strengthen tolerant attitudes among their participants. Such studies would complement the conceptual framework offered here and further strengthen efforts to cultivate a mature, tolerant, and intellectually grounded understanding of ikhtilaf among Muslim communities, researchers, educators, policymakers, and the

wider public alike.

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