

Collaborative Learning Strategies to Increase Religious Tolerance in Students: Building an Inclusive and Moderate Attitude in the Campus Environment

Ifham Choli

Program Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam, Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah Jakarta, Indonesia
ifhamcholi.fai@uia.ac.id

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Abstract:

Collaborative learning is seen as an approach that emphasizes not only cognitive aspects but also develops students' affective and social dimensions through interaction, dialogue, and collaboration across perspectives. Through the collaborative process in heterogeneous groups, students not only learn to understand academic material but also learn to appreciate differences, build empathy, and develop mutual respect in the context of religious diversity. This study aims to examine in depth the role of collaborative learning as a strategic tool in fostering religious tolerance among students at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University. Amidst the social dynamics and diverse religious backgrounds of students, the campus as an intellectual space has a moral and pedagogical responsibility to shape moderate, open, and inclusive characters. This study uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical research approach. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore in depth the experiences, views, and attitudes of students and lecturers in implementing collaborative learning. The results show that collaborative learning can create a safe, equal dialogue space for students to express their religious views while understanding others' perspectives. Intensive interaction in heterogeneous groups fosters mutual trust, empathy, and openness, ultimately strengthening religious tolerance.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Religious Tolerance, Students

Abstrak:

Pembelajaran kolaboratif dipandang sebagai pendekatan yang tidak hanya menekankan aspek kognitif, tetapi juga mengembangkan dimensi afektif dan sosial mahasiswa melalui interaksi, dialog, dan kerja sama lintas perspektif. Melalui proses kolaborasi dalam kelompok yang heterogen, mahasiswa tidak hanya belajar memahami materi akademik, tetapi juga belajar menghargai perbedaan, membangun empati, serta mengembangkan sikap saling menghormati dalam konteks keberagaman beragama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara mendalam peran pembelajaran kolaboratif sebagai sarana strategis dalam menumbuhkan sikap toleransi beragama pada mahasiswa Universitas Islam As-Syafi'iyah. Di tengah dinamika sosial dan keberagaman latar

belakang keagamaan mahasiswa, kampus sebagai ruang intelektual memiliki tanggung jawab moral dan pedagogis untuk membentuk karakter moderat, terbuka, dan inklusif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian deskriptif-analitis. Pendekatan ini dipilih karena memungkinkan peneliti untuk menggali secara mendalam pengalaman, pandangan, dan sikap mahasiswa serta dosen dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran kolaboratif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran kolaboratif mampu menciptakan ruang dialog yang aman dan setara bagi mahasiswa untuk mengekspresikan pandangan keagamaannya sekaligus memahami perspektif orang lain. Interaksi yang intensif dalam kelompok heterogen mendorong terbentuknya sikap saling percaya, empati, dan keterbukaan, yang pada akhirnya berkontribusi pada penguatan toleransi beragama

Kata Kunci: *Pembelajaran Kolaboratif, Toleransi Beragama, Mahasiswa*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, Islamic universities play a very important role, not only in transmitting Islamic knowledge but also in shaping students' character, mindset, and religious attitudes. (Mushtaq & Haroun, 2022);(Oviana & Rijal, 2021);(Marshallsay, 2012). As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University, as an institution of higher education, bears a significant responsibility to develop future educators who are not only academically and pedagogically competent but also possess a high level of social sensitivity, a moderate attitude, and the ability to build harmonious relationships in a pluralistic society. In this context, fifth-semester Islamic Religious Education (PAI) students are at a critical phase in the formation of their academic identity and religious attitudes. Students are expected to develop an inclusive, moderate attitude through collaborative learning that involves interactions with people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds (Dabutar, Nst, & Al Farabi, 2025);(Hanafi et al., 2023).

At this stage, fifth-semester Islamic Religious Education students are developing a more mature academic identity. They not only master the fundamentals of Islam but also must develop a moderate and inclusive attitude, which is essential when they enter the world of education. However, amidst increasingly complex social dynamics, the challenges of religious understanding among students are increasing. The flow of digital information and social media significantly influences student views, with many religious narratives sometimes extreme and exclusionary.(Oktavia, Yovica, & Amra, 2024);(Gani, Fattah, & Nasri, 2024);(Shamim, 2024).

This problem further exacerbates the state of Islamic higher education, particularly in the Development of student character. Islamic education, which should shape future educators capable of managing diversity in schools and communities, faces challenges in fostering a deeper sense of tolerance. Learning in

higher education often focuses on cognitive achievement and mastery of academic material, while the social and affective dimensions related to developing tolerance and interfaith dialogue have not been fully addressed (Mayhew, Shaheen, & Staples, 2024);(Shamoa-Nir, 2023);(Visser, Liefbroer, & Schoonmade, 2024).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the importance of developing religious tolerance in Islamic higher education. For example, research by Suryanto (Suryanto, 2023) suggests that Islamic religious education in higher education must prioritize moderation and inclusivity to address increasingly acute social polarization. Despite various efforts to foster tolerance, many learning approaches remain theoretical and underexplored, with students' direct experiences of interacting with diversity largely unexplored.

Another study by Hadi and Dermawan (Hadi, AR, & Dermawan, 2025) showed that collaborative learning can strengthen religious tolerance through inclusive interactions amid religious diversity. However, the implementation of this collaborative learning model in many universities is still limited to engaging students in discussions, without leading to a deeper understanding of religious tolerance. Therefore, the existing gap is the lack of integration between religious moderation theory and learning practices that can concretely change student attitudes.

Given the gap between theory and practice in Islamic education, this research is crucial and relevant. It aims to explore how collaborative learning can be used as a strategy to foster religious tolerance among students. Given that fifth-semester Islamic Education (PAI) students at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University are at a critical stage in the formation of their religious attitudes and identities, a more inclusive and moderate learning approach would be highly relevant in guiding them to become educators prepared to address diversity in education and society. Therefore, this research is urgently needed, given the numerous social challenges students face in today's digital era.

Based on the identified problems and gaps, the main question in this study is: How can collaborative learning be used to improve religious tolerance among students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program? Thus, this study will propose the use of collaborative learning to improve religious tolerance among students. With this approach, it is hoped that students will not only learn to accept differences but also to develop inclusive and moderate attitudes that are much needed in a pluralistic society. This study is expected to enrich the literature on Islamic education and religious tolerance and to contribute to the Development of more contextual learning theories. This article will also provide guidance for educators in designing learning experiences that prioritize not only cognition but also the Development of students' social and religious attitudes.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-analytical, qualitative approach to provide an in-depth description of the application of collaborative learning to foster religious tolerance among university students (Timmins, n.d.);(Rühlmann, 2023). This

research aims to capture the phenomena occurring in collaborative learning and analyze how the interaction and cooperation processes among students in heterogeneous groups can contribute to the Development of religious tolerance. This research not only describes the existing reality but also interprets the meaning of each interaction and dialogue that occurs during the learning process, thereby identifying important elements that foster the development of moderate and inclusive attitudes (Moleong, 2017).

The subjects in this study were fifth-semester students in the Islamic Religious Education Study Program at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University and lecturers who teach courses that implement the collaborative learning model. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique, selecting subjects based on specific considerations, namely their involvement in the collaborative learning process that is the focus of the study. With this technique, it is hoped that the data obtained will reflect students' and lecturers' real-life experiences and understanding of collaborative learning and its impact on religious tolerance. Their active participation in learning activities based on social interaction and group collaboration was the primary criterion for selecting research subjects.

Data collection techniques used in this study included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were conducted to directly observe collaborative learning activities in the classroom, particularly student interactions, discussion dynamics, and the resolution of disagreements. In-depth interviews were conducted to further explore students' and lecturers' subjective views and experiences of their participation in and teaching with this learning model. Documentation studies were used to obtain additional information from the learning materials and from student work, such as group assignments or discussions. The collected data were then analyzed using interactive methods, including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, and utilizing source and method triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the research results (Ishtiaq, 2019);(Creswell & Poth, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The collaborative learning implementation in this study was conducted in the odd semester of the 2025–2026 academic year at the Islamic Religious Education Study Program, As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University. Prior to the start of learning, a baseline mapping of students' attitudes and understanding of religious beliefs was conducted. The initial mapping results indicated that approximately 60% of students had less than moderate religious understanding. They tended to think exclusively, struggled to accept differing views, and were more likely to judge different religious practices. This situation is an important indicator that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning requires pedagogical strategies that go beyond simply strengthening cognitive aspects. Therefore, collaborative learning was designed to help shift students' thinking patterns from textual and

individualistic to a more dialogical, contextual, and moderate understanding.

In its implementation, collaborative learning focused on activities that engaged students in heterogeneous-group discussions, religious case studies, the analysis of faith-based social issues, and group projects. These activities are aimed not only at completing academic assignments but also at encouraging students to interact, engage in healthy debates, and learn to understand others' perspectives. Students who previously tended to have rigid religious understandings began to confront the reality of diverse views within their group. Through intense dialogue and guidance from lecturers, they were encouraged to reflect on their thinking and discover Islamic values that emphasize mercy, justice, and respect for differences. These interactions gradually fostered an awareness that differences are not something to be rejected, but can instead be a source of learning and enrichment of religious understanding.

The primary focus of the evaluation was on the 60% of students who initially demonstrated a relatively low level of religious moderation and poor learning outcomes. This group was of primary concern because they represented the greatest challenge in implementing collaborative learning. At the beginning of the semester, most students in this group tended to be passive in discussions, lacked confidence in expressing their opinions, and exhibited a tendency toward rigid thinking in understanding religious issues. The evaluation revealed significant changes after one semester of collaborative learning. The evaluation of these 18 students revealed marked improvements in several indicators, including the ability to present arguments openly, a willingness to listen to others' opinions, the quality of group collaboration, and a deeper understanding of the material and values of religious tolerance.

Table 1: Evaluation Results of the 5 Students Who Experienced the Most Significant Improvement

No	Aspect Assessed	Initial Condition (Pre-Learning)	Condition Collaborative Learning	After	Change Description
1	Discussion Participation	Passive, rarely speaks	Actively expresses opinions		Significant Improvement
2	Ability to Collaborate	Individualistic, less cooperative	Able to work in a heterogeneous team		Improved
3	Attitude Towards Differences	Tends to reject different views	More open and appreciative		Significant Improvement
4	Listening Skills	Often interrupts or ignores	More patient and respectful of turn-taking		Improved
5	Argumentation Style	Rigid, normative	More rational and moderate		Improved

Table 2: Evaluation Results of 5 Students (Most Dominant) from 18 Students

No	Aspect Explored	General Statement from Students	Key Findings
1	Understanding of Tolerance	<i>"Now I understand better that differences are part of Islam."</i>	Increased understanding of differences and tolerance

2	Attitude Towards Differences	"I used to have difficulty accepting other opinions, now I'm more open."	More moderate attitude, more open to accepting differences
3	Discussion Experience	"Group discussions taught me how to listen."	Improved dialogue skills and ability to listen
4	Group Cooperation	"We started helping each other, not just thinking individually."	Solidarity and better teamwork within the group
5	Personal Change	"I am calmer when there are different opinions."	Increased emotional control, calmer in facing differences

The evaluation showed that collaborative learning successfully transformed students' thinking and interactions, from those who previously tended to avoid differences to those who became more open and accepting of differing perspectives. Students not only understood the concept of tolerance theoretically but also internalized it as a practical experience in their academic and social lives. This demonstrates that collaborative learning can be a highly effective tool for fostering religious tolerance and developing moderate, inclusive character, in line with the Islamic values of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.



Picture: collaborative learning outcomes

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of collaborative learning in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at As-Syafi'iyah Islamic University successfully increased students' religious tolerance. Collaborative learning provides opportunities for students to interact in heterogeneous groups, discuss, and solve problems together. The constructivist theory proposed by (Piaget, 1989) and (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) supports this finding, emphasizing that knowledge is socially constructed through interactions with others. In this context, students not only develop a theoretical understanding of religious tolerance but also gain direct experience in facing and appreciating religious differences. Collaborative learning allows students to share perspectives, develop empathy, and develop more open and inclusive attitudes.

These findings also support the concept of "*learning through dialogue*" proposed by (Freire, 2020) which states that dialogue-based learning can change attitudes and enhance students' understanding of differences. In collaborative learning, students are invited to actively participate in discussions involving

diverse perspectives. This process introduces them to the concept of diversity as a strength, not a threat. For example, students who previously tended to avoid differences began to appreciate and accept others' perspectives after interacting in a heterogeneous group. Therefore, collaborative learning has proven effective in fostering an attitude of religious tolerance based on social experience, not just theoretical understanding.

Furthermore, these findings align with research conducted by (Irma-kaarina Ghosn, 2010);(I. K. Ghosn, 2002), which states that collaborative learning can strengthen attitudes of religious tolerance through inclusive interactions and dialogue between diverse perspectives. Ghosn emphasized that diversity in collaborative groups fosters open discussion, helping students overcome stereotypes and prejudices. In this study, students who previously displayed exclusive attitudes towards different views, through collaborative learning, began to change their views and develop more moderate and inclusive attitudes. This suggests that collaboration can reduce tensions between groups and deepen understanding of the importance of tolerance in a religious context.

In further interpretation, a supporting factor influencing these results is the role of lecturers as facilitators who can direct discussions and keep interactions within the bounds of scientific and Islamic ethics. As stated by Brookfield (S. D. Brookfield, 2015);(S. Brookfield & Preskill, 1999), lecturers function as mediators in the critical learning process, guiding students to think reflectively and consider the views of others. In this study, the role of lecturers as facilitators who facilitate dialogue and help students reflect on their views proved to be very important. Lecturers not only convey material, but also encourage students to think critically about Islamic values that emphasize *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *musyawarah* (dialogue) in dealing with differences.

Although the findings of this study indicate positive changes in attitudes, implementing collaborative learning still faces challenges. Some students who initially have a highly textual and rigid understanding of religion tend to have difficulty adapting to a learning model that demands openness to differing views. This condition aligns with studies that confirm that narrow, exclusive interpretations of religion can encourage dogmatic and intolerant perspectives, thereby giving rise to resistance when students are confronted with inter-perspective dialogue (Mohamad Fahri; Ahmad Zainuri, 2020). These findings also indicate that this resistance is not permanent; for the majority of students, a consistent collaborative process can still guide change toward more moderate and inclusive attitudes, though this requires time and ongoing strengthening of interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that through a learning process that emphasizes cooperation, dialogue, and interaction in heterogeneous groups, students not only improve their cognitive abilities but also experience transformations in their attitudes and perspectives towards religious differences. Collaborative learning can create a safe and equal dialogue space, enabling students to express their opinions, listen to, and respect others' views. Changes in aspects of discussion

participation, the ability to work together, attitudes towards differences, listening skills, and ways of arguing indicate that religious tolerance is not only understood theoretically but also internalized through shared learning experiences. Especially for groups of students who initially have a less moderate understanding of religion, collaborative learning is an effective way to build awareness of the importance of an open, dialogical attitude and respect for differences. Collaborative learning is a strategic approach to teaching Islamic Religious Education in higher education, particularly to foster a moderate, tolerant character in a pluralistic society. This approach is in line with Islamic values that emphasize mercy, justice, and respect for diversity as part of the sunnah in social life.

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