

The Transformation of Tolerance Attitudes Among Santri Gopal Gabul: A Multicultural Islamic Education Perspective

¹Rohim Habibi, ²Linna Endah Nur Wahyuni, ³Umi Robi'atin Musfa'ah

¹²³Pendidikan Agama Islam, Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan, IAI Al Muhammad Cepu

¹habib.rohim83@gmail.com, ²linna.endah79@gmail.com, ³umymusfa@gmail.com

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Corresponding author : Rohim Habibi

Email : habib.rohim83@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menelaah kontribusi komunitas Santri Gopal Gabul dalam membentuk sikap toleransi melalui kerangka pendidikan Islam multikultural. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dan pendekatan fenomenologis, data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, serta dokumentasi yang melibatkan pengasuh pesantren, tokoh lintas iman, tokoh masyarakat, dan aparat pemerintah setempat. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunitas ini menghidupkan bentuk spiritualitas sosial transformatif yang diwujudkan melalui kepemimpinan inklusif, keteladanan moral, dialog lintas agama yang berkesinambungan, serta interaksi lintas budaya. Praktik tersebut berhasil menumbuhkan karakter santri yang toleran, empatik, dan berpikiran terbuka sehingga mampu berinteraksi secara konstruktif dengan beragam kelompok agama dan budaya. Berbeda dengan pesantren konvensional yang cenderung menekankan struktur formal, komunitas yang berkembang secara organik ini justru menghadirkan model pendidikan Islam yang kontekstual, dinamis, dan responsif terhadap realitas lokal. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa komunitas pesantren berbasis spiritualitas sosial dapat menjadi laboratorium efektif bagi pendidikan toleransi. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada perumusan model pendidikan Islam multikultural yang berakar pada praktik lokal namun tetap merefleksikan nilai-nilai universal Islam dalam bingkai kebangsaan dan kemanusiaan.

Kata kunci: *Komunitas Inklusif; Pendidikan Islam Multikultural; Spiritualitas Sosial; Transformasi Sikap Toleran*

Abstract

This study explores the Santri Gopal Gabul community's contribution to shaping tolerance through a multicultural Islamic education framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, data were gathered via in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation involving pesantren caregivers, interfaith leaders, community figures, and local authorities. The findings indicate that the santri Gopal Gabul community is a transformative form of social spirituality expressed through inclusive leadership, moral exemplarity, sustained interfaith dialogue, and cross-cultural interaction. These practices have nurtured santri with tolerant, empathetic, and open-minded dispositions, enabling them to engage constructively across religious and cultural boundaries. Unlike conventional pesantren that emphasize formal structures, this organically developed community demonstrates a contextual model of Islamic education that is both dynamic and responsive to local realities. The study concludes that pesantren-based communities can serve as effective laboratories for tolerance education. The originality of this research lies in formulating a model of multicultural Islamic education rooted in local practice while reflecting universal Islamic values within the framework of national and human solidarity.

Keyword: *Inclusive Community; Multicultural Islamic Education; Social Spirituality; Transformation of Tolerance Attitudes*

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's rich diversity presents both significant challenges and valuable opportunities in fostering inclusive social relations. The plurality of religions, cultures, ethnicities, and languages necessitates cultivating a shared societal awareness of the importance of tolerance. However, in recent times, the nation has faced increasing identity-based conflicts, religious polarization, and rising symptoms of intolerance that threaten national unity. (Safei, 2020) One such example is the case of bullying and forced dissolution of a Rosary prayer service conducted by a group of Catholic students from Pamulang University on Jalan Ampera Poncol, Cisauk, South Tangerang, Banten. (Arya, 2024). This incident highlights the paradox of Indonesia's diversity: while it is a source of cultural richness, it can also deepen societal divisions. This reality underscores the urgent need for education as a strategic medium to internalize values of solidarity, rooted in mutual respect and appreciation for differences.

Within the framework of national education, Islamic education occupies a distinctive position as a carrier of moral and spiritual values that significantly contribute to the formation of societal character. Islamic educational institutions—both formal and informal—not only impart religious knowledge but are also entrusted with shaping a moderate and open-minded religious identity. The development of Islamic knowledge as a source of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation) necessitates the emergence of individuals who uphold the principles of peaceful coexistence while remaining faithful to the authenticity of their beliefs. (Mazid & Suharno, 2019). Therefore, multicultural Islamic education is a relevant approach to responding to the needs of the times.

In this context, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*)—as long-standing pillars of traditional Islamic education—have made substantial contributions to nurturing generations who are not only devout in ritual practice but also responsive to evolving societal dynamics. Their educational ethos emphasizes integrating religious devotion with social engagement, enabling students to navigate complex realities while maintaining their spiritual grounding (Saputro, 2021). A study by Marzuki, Miftahuddin, and Mukhamad Murdiono (2020) on Multicultural Education in Salaf *Pesantren* and the Prevention of Religious Radicalism in Indonesia demonstrates that the four *pesantren* under investigation shared standard practices in implementing the core values of multiculturalism, while still retaining distinctive characteristics shaped by their respective caregivers. Their findings affirm that the cultural frameworks cultivated within these *pesantren* have been effective in curbing radical tendencies both within

the institutions and in the surrounding communities. However, such analyses remain confined mainly to formal pesantren settings with structured organizational systems. In contrast, this study examines the Goba Gabul santri community, an organically emerging religious collective that lacks formalized institutional arrangements yet embodies a popular, modest, and inclusive expression of Islam. By focusing on the transformation of tolerance attitudes within this non-conventional pesantren environment, the present research addresses a gap in the literature, offering insights into how multicultural Islamic education operates beyond traditional institutional boundaries and adapts to the lived, dynamic realities of grassroots Muslim communities.

According to the supervisor of the Goba Gabul Santri community, *“It all began in 2006 when a group of alumni from Al-Muhammad Cepu Islamic Boarding School requested a regular al-Hikam recitation. Over time, this community, initially centered in homes with everyday activities—such as operating small food stalls (angkringan) like Mas Prayitno in Jiken—gradually evolved into a gathering space for a diverse range of individuals. These included alumni, current santri, muhibbin (knowledge seekers), residents, and even former delinquents who wished to start a new chapter in life. In this setting, former street toughs like Mas Narto and non-Muslim guests could sit comfortably side by side with santri and others.”* (Interview with AH, 20 June 2025, at Al-Muhammad Cepu Islamic Boarding School).

This research seeks to enrich and extend existing theoretical frameworks on multicultural Islamic education by critically engaging with and advancing beyond previous studies, such as Suryono’s dissertation, *The Values of Tolerance at the Al-Mukmin Islamic Boarding School in Ngruki, Sukoharjo*. (Suryono, 2021). Suryono’s work demonstrates that tolerant dispositions among ustadz and ustadzah at PPIM Ngruki manifest through attitudes of peace, respect for diversity, and social awareness, values objectified within the institution’s vision, mission, curriculum, and regulations, and internalized through the principle of *rahmatan lil’alamin*. These findings underscore the role of pesantren as agents of moderation through hybrid curricula that merge traditional Islamic education with civic instruction emphasizing moral embodiment. Complementary to this, Haris Munandar’s (2024) *The Dissertation* explores multicultural education communication from the Qur’anic hermeneutical perspective, while Ahmad Mubarak’s (2025) and Nopian Gustari’s (2021) works respectively focus on the implementation of multicultural learning models and strategies for internalizing tolerance to counter radicalism in pesantren.

However, these studies predominantly concentrate on theoretical constructs, pedagogical models, or preventive strategies, leaving the transformative process through which tolerance attitudes evolve within the lived experience of santri, especially in pesantren that engage transnationally, underexplored. Addressing this gap, the present study, “The Transformation of Tolerance Attitudes among Santri Goba Gabul: A Multicultural Islamic Education Perspective,” offers a novel analytical lens by examining how santri at a globally oriented pesantren reinterpret, negotiate, and transform tolerance values amid direct encounters with multicultural realities. By integrating institutional analysis with phenomenological inquiry into everyday practices, this research not only bridges the conceptual and empirical dimensions of multicultural Islamic education but also contributes a new contextual framework for understanding how pesantren-based tolerance adapts to the dynamics of global citizenship and pluralism in contemporary Indonesia.

METHOD

This study is a field-based qualitative study employing a descriptive-phenomenological design. (A. Riris Muldani, 2024; Moleong, 2019). The objects of inquiry encompass individuals, groups, and social practices that represent the lived experiences of the Goba Gabul santri community. The research primarily seeks to understand actions, meaning-making processes, and social relations that embody the values of spirituality and tolerance in everyday interactions. Data sources include santri, kyai (pesantren caretakers), religious counselors, village and sub-district leaders, and non-Muslim community members who have direct contact with the pesantren. (Creswell, 2020).

A phenomenological approach was adopted to uncover the essential meanings of tolerance as it is experienced, rather than merely conceptualized, within the santri’s social world. (Bable, 2002). This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of how the Goba Gabul santri reinterpret and actualize tolerance in interreligious and intercultural encounters. Data collection utilized three complementary techniques: (1) participatory observation to capture behavioral and contextual nuances. (Arikunto, 2014), (2) semi-structured interviews to elicit subjective meanings and reflexive interpretations (Nawawi & Hadari, 2005); and (3) document analysis of institutional materials such as curricula, activity reports, and pesantren regulations (Sarlito, 2000).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2019) based on clear inclusion criteria: (a) active involvement in pesantren activities or local interfaith programs, (b)

at least two years of engagement with the pesantren community, and (c) demonstrable familiarity with tolerance-related practices within the pesantren environment. The total of 10 informants included religious leaders (kyai), santri, Islamic counselors, village and sub-district officials, and non-Muslim residents living in the surrounding area. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage. Ethical clearance was also guided by the institutional research ethics framework, emphasizing respect, beneficence, and non-maleficence.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana. (2014), consisting of three cyclical stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During analysis, open and axial coding techniques were applied to identify recurring themes and patterns, followed by selective coding to synthesize essential meanings relevant to the transformation of tolerance among santri. To strengthen validity, the study employed methodological triangulation across data sources, collection techniques, and observation periods. In addition, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails were conducted to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability of findings. (Rahmat, 2022). These combined strategies provided a transparent and trustworthy basis for interpreting how tolerance is internalized, negotiated, and transformed within the Global Gabul santri community.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Spiritual Characteristics of the Goba Gabul Santri Community

The spirituality that develops within the Santri Global Gabul community can be characterized as inclusive religiosity, a lived expression of faith that harmonizes theological conviction with openness to diversity. This form of spirituality embodies the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil'alamin* (mercy to all creation) and aligns with Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's concept of *insan adabi*, the ethically disciplined and civilized human being nurtured through *ta'diib* (moral education) as the ultimate goal of Islamic pedagogy. (Ahadiyah Hanum, 2024; Al-Attas, 1979). It also resonates with James W. Fowler's theory of universalizing faith, wherein spiritual maturity is marked by compassion, inclusivity, and transcendence beyond sectarian boundaries. (Hasan, 2018).

In practice, the spirituality of the Santri Gopal Gabul community manifests not as ritual formalism but as social devotion (*ibadah ijtimaiyah*), faith translated into ethical and communal engagement. Guided by Kiai Halim, this ethos integrates *uswah hasanah* (exemplary conduct) and *tazkiyatun nafs* (spiritual purification) into daily interactions that cultivate empathy, respect, and cooperation among students of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. Such spirituality mirrors Paulo Freire's concept of conscientization, in which education is a process of critical and moral awakening that connects reflection with transformative action. (Freire, 2005). It also aligns with Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutical notion of continual self-renewal, situating spirituality as an interpretive and evolving process. (Ricoeur, 2014).

Empirical findings show that this spiritual formation generates social capital— trust, solidarity, and mutual aid —that transcends religious boundaries, consistent with Robert Putnam's framework of civic engagement. (Santoso, 2020). Local cultural values such as *gotong royong* (cooperation) and *musyawarah* (deliberation) serve as vehicles for embodying Islamic ethics, reinforcing Armando Salvatore's Living Islam perspective. (2017), which emphasizes contextual expressions of Islamic morality. Informant narratives reveal that this spirituality empowers santri to reinterpret Islamic teachings dynamically, promoting interfaith collaboration and social harmony without compromising religious authenticity.

What distinguishes the Santri Global Gabul community model from other pesantren-based tolerance studies, such as PPIM Ngruki's rational moderate approach (Suryono, 2021) Or the civic-oriented pedagogy of Al-Islamiyah pesantren. (Mubarok, 2025). It is the synthesis of classical Islamic spirituality, local wisdom, and multicultural praxis. Rather than merely teaching tolerance as doctrine, Gopal Gabul embeds it as a transformative experience rooted in everyday interaction and emotional intelligence. This approach nurtures spiritually resilient individuals capable of transcending stigma and marginalization, echoing Wilber's transpersonal psychology that associates spiritual maturity with self-actualization and social responsibility. (Yulianti, 2018).

In essence, the spiritual characteristics of the Santri Gopal Gabul community represent a holistic synthesis of *ta'dīb*, *uswah hasanah*, and *rahmatan lil'ālamīn*, intertwined with multicultural awareness and participatory ethics. This spirituality not only produces personally devout individuals but also cultivates agents of transformation, santri who embody tolerance, compassion, and justice as integral expressions of faith in a pluralistic society.

Internalization and Transformation of the Values of Tolerance of Santri Gobal Gabul in Life Practice

The internalization of tolerance values within the Santri Global Gabul community is grounded in a spiritual pedagogical approach shaped by the exemplary leadership (*uswah hasanah*) of Kiai Abdul Halim Mujtaba. Rather than transmitting Islamic teachings solely through formal instruction, the Kiai models tolerance through consistent acts of openness, empathy, and respect in everyday interaction. His conduct exemplifies how faith and humanity intersect in social practice. This approach is vividly reflected in the testimony of Muradi (Eyes), a non-Muslim village head, who remarked, *“I am not a Muslim, but I never felt like an outsider. The Kiai treated me like any other santri. He even invited me to have coffee together on the pesantren's porch. That is when I realized that tolerance here is not just politeness, it is genuine”* (Interview with MR, 21 June 2025, Kutukan, Blora). Such lived experience affirms Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, which posits that moral behavior is best internalized through observing credible role models (Firmansyah & Saepuloh, 2022). Within Islamic education, this mirrors the pedagogical principle of *uswah hasanah*, in which moral formation arises from the embodiment of values rather than from prescriptive teaching.

The transformation of tolerance among the santri is further facilitated through daily engagement with the multicultural society surrounding the pesantren, particularly with non-Muslim communities in Cepu. These encounters provide experiential learning spaces that dismantle prejudice and nurture empathy. This aligns with Allport’s contact hypothesis, which emphasizes that sustained, cooperative interaction across group boundaries reduces stereotypes and fosters understanding. (Afandi et al., 2021). Practices such as interfaith visits, communal service, and shared social initiatives illustrate that tolerance in the Santri Gobal Gabul community is not an abstract doctrine but a lived moral habit. As expressed by Prayitno, a santri, *“When we visit sick residents, regardless of religion, we pray and help together. That is when I learned tolerance must be lived, not preached.”* This participatory praxis resonates with Banks’s transformative model of multicultural education, where learners cultivate critical and emotional awareness through lived engagement with diversity (Purwasari et al., 2023).

The process of internalization thus extends beyond the cognitive domain toward emotional and moral consciousness. Many santri undergo reflective transformation from prior social alienation to moral openness, reflecting Lawrence Kohlberg’s post-conventional stage of moral reasoning, in which individuals act upon universal ethical principles (Yilmaz et al., 2019). In the Gobal Gabul context, this moral evolution is embedded in recurring social rituals such as

gotong royong (communal cooperation), Ramadan visits to churches, and service to marginalized groups. These practices gradually form a collective moral disposition, consistent with Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* —a durable system of values embodied through repeated social experience (Susanti, 2024).

Symbolic transformation also plays a pivotal role. The term *Gobal Gabul*, once a pejorative label denoting rootlessness, has been redefined into a moral identity that signifies resilience, inclusivity, and the pursuit of knowledge. As noted by Kiai Halim, “*Santri Gobal-Gabul used to mean those who wandered. Now, it refers to students who seek Islamic knowledge wherever the Kiai goes (ngalor-ngidul) in the path of learning*” (Interview with HM, 21 June 2025, Pondok Pesantren Al Muhammad 3, Cepu). This resemanticization illustrates how moral language operates as a symbolic unifier, transforming stigma into spiritual dignity. (Tago, 2013).

Ultimately, the internalization and transformation of tolerance values evolve into an emancipatory pedagogy that empowers santri and community members to become agents of peace and social transformation. Figures such as Prayitno (religious instructor), Sugiyono (village head), and Heru (police intelligence officer) exemplify how internalized tolerance manifests in civic leadership and interfaith collaboration. This process reflects Paulo Freire's notion of liberatory education, in which learners transcend passive acceptance to become conscious actors shaping their social reality. (Freire, 2005). Within this framework, Islamic values of *tasamuh* (tolerance), *ta'aaruf* (mutual recognition), and *ukhuwah insaniyah* (universal brotherhood) are actualized in local, multicultural praxis.

Thus, the Santri Gobal Gabul community represents a living laboratory of multicultural Islamic education, where tolerance is not merely taught but embodied, negotiated, and transformed through daily experience. This model advances prior pesantren-based tolerance studies by demonstrating that integrating spiritual leadership, contextual social interaction, and critical reflection can cultivate devout yet open-minded santri who live Islam as both faith and social ethics in a plural society.

Contribution of the Santri Gobal Gabul Practical Model to the Perspective of Multicultural Islamic Education

The practical model developed by the Santri Gobal Gabul community represents a transformative contribution to the discourse of multicultural Islamic education. It transcends the conventional dichotomy between religious orthodoxy and pluralistic engagement by

demonstrating that Islamic spirituality can operate as an inclusive social ethic. Rather than functioning as a mere doctrinal system, Islam is reinterpreted here as a moral framework that encourages coexistence, empathy, and collaborative action across religious boundaries. Through participatory engagement—interfaith service, dialogic study circles, and shared civic initiatives—the Gobaal Gabul community situates Islamic learning within lived social realities, thereby grounding theology in praxis. This approach affirms James A. Banks’ view that multicultural education is not simply about representation, but about transforming structural relations through culturally responsive practices (Purwasari et al., 2023).

What distinguishes this model is its intercultural ecology, an organic network of relationships that equalizes participation among Muslims, Christians, adherents of local belief systems, and even secular groups. These relations are sustained not through formal agreements, but through the habit of *ukhuwah insaniyyah* (human brotherhood), which converts social interaction into moral solidarity. Ibu Eki Novita, head of the Cepu subdistrict, notes: *“I personally witnessed how the Santri Gobaal Gabul community built cross-institutional and interfaith communication with sincerity and consistency. They maintained bonds of friendship not for projects or appearances, but as a part of everyday life”* (Interview with EN, 22 June 2025, Cepu). Her statement captures what Pierre Bourdieu might call symbolic capital -trust, recognition, and moral credibility- which allows the community to act as a cultural mediator and peacebuilder.

Theologically, this praxis is anchored in *Fiqh al-Tasamuh* (jurisprudence of tolerance) as articulated by Yusuf al-Qaradawi, emphasizing moral responsibility toward all humanity irrespective of faith. (Utami, Lutfi Ayu Fadhilah; Sulistiorini, Tri; Lestari, 2023). It operationalizes the Qur’anic principle of *la ikraha fi al-din* (no compulsion in religion; Q.S. al-Baqarah: 256) not as a passive statement of tolerance, but as an active ethic of engagement. This form of lived theology bridges normative Islam with multicultural citizenship, positioning pesantren as laboratories for interfaith coexistence rather than insular religious institutions.

Beyond theological affirmation, the Gobaal Gabul model embodies an emancipatory pedagogy that redefines inclusion through action. It engages marginalized groups -former street thugs, indigenous communities, and followers of local belief systems- not as objects of *da‘wah*, but as co-creators of social harmony. Their involvement in educational and communal activities generates a sense of collective belonging, echoing Gordon and Nieto’s (1992) critique of segregated education. In doing so, the model extends Islamic education’s reach to social

peripheries often neglected by mainstream institutions, thereby humanizing the function of religious education itself.

Equally innovative is the model's participatory governance, which replaces hierarchical authority with dialogical decision-making. As Purnomo, a youth leader from Pengkoljagong, recounted: *"They often invite us to discuss ideas before launching programs. The approach is collaborative, not instructive"* (Interview with PR, 21 June 2025, Blora). This democratic ethos reflects Paulo Freire's concept of dialogical pedagogy, in which learners and educators co-construct meaning through social transformation. (Freire, 2005). Within the pesantren context, this reimagines rahmatan lil 'alamin not as rhetorical idealism, but as the operational principle for egalitarian community building.

The impact of the Santri Gopal Gabul model extends into broader civic and educational frameworks. Through partnerships with interfaith leaders, local government, and civil organizations, the community functions as a moral bridge connecting religious, cultural, and bureaucratic spheres. Its activities - ranging from disaster response to cultural festivals - reflect the public theology of Islam, where faith becomes an instrument for sustaining the common good. This orientation reinforces Widodo's (2023) Idea of "cultural responsiveness" as a hallmark of modern multicultural pedagogy, situating the pesantren as both a site of religious formation and civic innovation.

From an epistemological perspective, the Santri Gopal Gabul community model contributes a grassroots paradigm to Islamic educational theory. It challenges top-down curriculum models by proving that multicultural values are more effectively learned through contextual praxis than through textual instruction. The santri, through critical reflection and engagement with difference, become reflective practitioners who reinterpret sacred texts in light of plural social realities. This synthesis of spirituality, social participation, and critical consciousness illustrates how Islamic education can evolve into a holistic model of character formation, ethical, intellectual, and civic at once.

In the broader discourse of multicultural Islamic education, the Santri Gopal Gabul experience introduces three key contributions. First, it offers a contextual reinterpretation of *tasamuh*, shifting tolerance from a moral ideal to a participatory practice. Second, it demonstrates a pedagogical integration of spiritual formation with intercultural competence, addressing the gap between theology and social diversity. Third, it provides an institutional prototype for community-based Islamic education that fosters peacebuilding and civic engagement in plural societies. These contributions situate the Gopal Gabul model not as a

peripheral experiment, but as a relevant pedagogical innovation with implications for the global Muslim educational landscape.

Ultimately, the Santri Gopal Gabul community exemplifies how pesantren can reassert their role as dynamic agents of social transformation in the 21st century. By merging faith, humanity, and pluralism into a coherent educational praxis, it challenges the dichotomy between traditionalism and modern multiculturalism. This living model reveals that the essence of Islamic education is not confined to doctrinal preservation but lies in cultivating compassionate intelligence capable of navigating difference. In this sense, the Gopal Gabul model contributes not only to the local landscape of Indonesian Islam but also to the evolving architecture of global multicultural education.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the spirituality developing within the santri Gopal Gabul community is not exclusive or doctrinal, but rather transformative and socio-inclusive. Its primary characteristic lies in its openness to building social relationships that reflect the values of tolerance, empathy, and equality. This spirituality is internalized through consistent daily practices of togetherness, social service, and active involvement in nurturing diversity. The value of tolerance is not merely an abstract principle but is authentically actualized in community life, including interactions with non-Santri and non-Muslim groups.

The process of internalizing and transforming the values of tolerance in this community takes place through a reflective, participatory, and practical approach. These values are not formally taught; instead, they are brought to life in daily life through habituation, role modeling, and collective interaction within a shared social space. The internalization of tolerance is also reinforced by contextual religious narratives and local narratives that value cultural wisdom. Santri Gopal Gabul community becomes active participants in bridging the gap between religious texts and the reality of diversity, thus enabling them to form new configurations of inclusive and liberating spirituality.

The contribution of the santri Gopal Gabul model of practice to the perspective of multicultural Islamic education is significant. This community has implemented a contextual, responsive, and transformative educational approach to socio-diversity dynamics. Their approach aligns with the principles of contemporary multicultural education, which emphasize cross-identity learning, social justice, and intercultural dialogue. This practice demonstrates the

inherent adaptability of Islamic values to the plurality of society, while also offering an alternative model of education based on community and spiritual values.

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