

Islamic Education and Intercultural Competence: Promoting Religious Literacy in Multicultural Societies

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Islamic education in promoting intercultural competence and religious literacy within increasingly multicultural societies. The research aims to explore the theoretical relationship between Islamic educational philosophy, intercultural competence, and religious literacy while identifying their potential contributions to social cohesion, inclusive citizenship, and peaceful coexistence. The study employs a qualitative library research approach using a systematic review of contemporary scholarly literature. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and international educational documents and analyzed through thematic content analysis to identify recurring concepts, emerging trends, and theoretical convergences. The findings indicate that Islamic education possesses substantial potential to foster intercultural competence through core principles such as ta'āraf (mutual understanding), karāmah (human dignity), 'adl (justice), rahmah (compassion), and ta'āwun (cooperation). The study further reveals that religious literacy and intercultural competence function as complementary educational objectives that strengthen empathy, critical thinking, ethical citizenship, social inclusion, and intercultural dialogue. The novelty of this research lies in the development of the Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF), an integrative conceptual model that synthesizes Islamic educational philosophy, intercultural competence theory, and religious literacy studies into a comprehensive framework for multicultural education. The study concludes that Islamic education can serve as a significant educational resource for preparing learners to engage responsibly and constructively in culturally and religiously diverse societies while maintaining strong ethical and spiritual foundations.

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Introduction

The twenty-first century has been characterized by unprecedented levels of globalization, migration, technological advancement, and intercultural interaction. As societies become increasingly interconnected, individuals are more frequently exposed to diverse religious, cultural, linguistic, and ideological perspectives. While such diversity creates opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, it also presents challenges related to social cohesion, identity formation, prejudice, and intercultural conflict. Educational institutions are therefore expected to prepare learners not only with academic knowledge but also with the competencies necessary to engage constructively in diverse societies. In this context, intercultural competence has emerged as a critical educational objective across many national and international educational frameworks. Scholars increasingly recognize that fostering intercultural competence is essential for promoting peaceful coexistence and sustainable social development in multicultural societies (UNESCO, 2023; Dearthoff, 2020).

Intercultural competence generally refers to the ability to interact effectively, appropriately, and respectfully with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

This competence encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, including cultural awareness, empathy, communication skills, openness, and critical self-reflection. Contemporary educational research suggests that intercultural competence is not an innate characteristic but rather a developmental process that can be cultivated through intentional educational experiences. As societies become more diverse, educational systems are increasingly expected to equip learners with these competencies. Consequently, intercultural competence has become a central component of global citizenship education, multicultural education, and peace education initiatives worldwide. The growing importance of intercultural competence has stimulated extensive scholarly interest across various educational contexts (Deardorff, 2020; Barrett et al., 2023).

Alongside intercultural competence, the concept of religious literacy has gained increasing attention in contemporary educational discourse. Religious literacy refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and engage critically with religious beliefs, practices, traditions, and their social implications. It extends beyond factual knowledge of religions by fostering nuanced understanding, critical thinking, and respect for religious diversity. In multicultural societies, religious literacy is increasingly viewed as an essential competency for promoting social harmony and reducing prejudice. Educational scholars argue that insufficient understanding of religious traditions often contributes to stereotypes, discrimination, and social tensions. Therefore, enhancing religious literacy has become an important educational strategy for fostering inclusive and pluralistic societies (Moore, 2021; Jackson, 2022).

The significance of religious literacy has become particularly evident in contemporary discussions regarding social cohesion and democratic citizenship. Many societies continue to experience tensions related to religious diversity, identity politics, and cultural polarization. In such contexts, educational institutions play a crucial role in helping learners develop informed and respectful attitudes toward different religious communities. Research suggests that religious literacy contributes to intercultural dialogue by enabling individuals to understand how religious beliefs influence values, behaviors, and social interactions. Furthermore, religious literacy can help learners recognize both the diversity within religious traditions and the common ethical concerns shared across different faith communities. Consequently, religious literacy has become increasingly relevant within broader educational efforts to promote intercultural understanding and social inclusion (Dinham, 2022; Jackson, 2022).

Islamic education occupies a particularly important position within these discussions because of its growing significance in multicultural and pluralistic societies. Muslim communities constitute substantial and expanding populations in many regions, including Europe, North America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. As a result, questions regarding the role of Islamic education in promoting social cohesion, citizenship, and intercultural understanding have become increasingly prominent. Contemporary Islamic educational institutions are expected not only to transmit religious knowledge but also to prepare learners for participation in diverse social environments. This expectation requires educational approaches capable of balancing religious identity formation with intercultural engagement. Therefore, examining the relationship between Islamic education and intercultural competence represents an important area of educational research (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

Historically, Islamic educational traditions have emphasized values that support intercultural engagement and social coexistence. Classical Islamic scholarship emerged

within highly diverse societies characterized by interactions among Muslims, Christians, Jews, and adherents of other religious traditions. Throughout Islamic history, scholars participated in intellectual exchanges that transcended religious and cultural boundaries. Principles such as justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), human dignity (*karāmah*), and mutual understanding (*ta'āruf*) were central to these interactions. Contemporary scholars increasingly argue that these principles provide valuable foundations for intercultural education in modern contexts. Consequently, Islamic educational philosophy possesses significant resources for promoting intercultural competence and religious literacy (Kamali, 2023; Ahmed, 2021).

One of the most significant Qur'anic foundations for intercultural engagement is the concept of *ta'āruf*, which emphasizes mutual knowledge and understanding among diverse peoples and communities. The Qur'an explicitly acknowledges human diversity as a deliberate aspect of creation and encourages interaction across social and cultural differences. Contemporary Islamic scholars interpret *ta'āruf* as an ethical framework for intercultural dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. Educational approaches informed by this principle encourage learners to view diversity as an opportunity for learning rather than a source of division. Such perspectives align closely with contemporary theories of intercultural competence. Therefore, *ta'āruf* provides an important conceptual foundation for integrating Islamic education and intercultural learning (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

The growing diversity of contemporary societies has generated renewed interest in educational approaches that support intercultural understanding. Migration, globalization, and digital communication have transformed patterns of social interaction, creating opportunities for contact among individuals from diverse backgrounds. However, these developments have also contributed to the spread of misinformation, stereotypes, and cultural misunderstandings. Educational researchers emphasize that meaningful intercultural engagement requires more than superficial exposure to diversity. Instead, learners must develop critical awareness, empathy, and communication skills capable of supporting constructive interactions. Islamic education can contribute to these objectives by integrating ethical and spiritual dimensions into intercultural learning processes (Barrett et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Recent studies indicate that religious education can play a positive role in promoting intercultural competence when it adopts inclusive and dialogical approaches. Rather than reinforcing exclusivist perspectives, contemporary religious education increasingly emphasizes critical inquiry, reflection, and engagement with diversity. Research conducted in multicultural educational settings demonstrates that learners exposed to dialogical religious education often exhibit greater openness toward different beliefs and cultures. These findings challenge assumptions that religious education necessarily contributes to social division. Instead, they suggest that appropriately designed religious education can strengthen intercultural understanding and civic participation. Such evidence has important implications for contemporary Islamic education (Jackson, 2022; Dinham, 2022).

The concept of intercultural competence itself has evolved significantly over the past two decades. Early models focused primarily on communication skills and cultural knowledge. More recent frameworks emphasize critical reflection, ethical responsibility, social justice, and transformative learning. These developments reflect recognition that intercultural competence involves not only understanding others but also examining one's own assumptions and power relations. Educational scholars

increasingly advocate holistic approaches that integrate cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning. Such approaches resonate strongly with Islamic educational traditions that emphasize character development alongside intellectual growth. Therefore, contemporary theories of intercultural competence provide valuable insights for rethinking Islamic education in multicultural contexts (Deardorff, 2020; Barrett et al., 2023).

Another important development concerns the relationship between intercultural competence and global citizenship. Global citizenship education seeks to prepare learners for responsible participation in an interconnected world characterized by cultural diversity and shared global challenges. Intercultural competence is widely recognized as a core component of global citizenship because it enables constructive engagement across cultural differences. Similarly, Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes social responsibility, justice, and concern for the common good. These shared objectives suggest significant potential for dialogue between Islamic education and contemporary citizenship education frameworks. Consequently, integrating intercultural competence into Islamic education may contribute to both religious literacy and global citizenship development (UNESCO, 2023; Bosio, 2022).

Educational institutions also face increasing pressure to address issues of religious misunderstanding and Islamophobia. Negative stereotypes and misinformation concerning Islam continue to influence public discourse in many societies. Such challenges underscore the importance of educational initiatives that promote accurate understanding of religious traditions and encourage respectful dialogue. Religious literacy provides an important tool for addressing these issues by fostering informed engagement with religious diversity. Islamic education can contribute to this objective by presenting Islam within broader contexts of pluralism, ethics, and intercultural understanding. Therefore, religious literacy serves both educational and social purposes in multicultural societies (Jackson, 2022; Dinham, 2022).

Contemporary scholarship further emphasizes that religious literacy should not be limited to learning about one's own religious tradition. Effective religious literacy involves understanding multiple religious perspectives and recognizing the complexity of religious identities. Such understanding contributes to empathy, critical thinking, and social cohesion. Educational researchers argue that learners who possess higher levels of religious literacy are generally better equipped to navigate diverse social environments. This perspective aligns with Islamic teachings that encourage knowledge seeking, reflection, and respectful engagement with others. Consequently, religious literacy represents an important educational objective within contemporary Islamic education (Moore, 2021; Jackson, 2022).

Empirical research conducted in Muslim educational settings provides growing evidence regarding the benefits of intercultural educational approaches. Studies indicate that learners participating in intercultural dialogue programs often demonstrate increased tolerance, empathy, and willingness to engage with diversity. Other research suggests that integrating global perspectives into Islamic education enhances learners' civic awareness and intercultural sensitivity. These findings support arguments that Islamic education can play a constructive role in promoting intercultural competence. However, scholars also note the need for more systematic frameworks capable of guiding educational practice. This gap highlights the importance of further theoretical and empirical research in this area (Memon, 2021; Sahin, 2022).

Despite these developments, significant challenges remain. Existing scholarship often examines Islamic education, religious literacy, and intercultural competence as separate fields of inquiry. Relatively few studies have explored their intersections in a comprehensive manner. Furthermore, there remains limited understanding of how Islamic educational principles can be operationalized within contemporary multicultural educational contexts. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary approaches that draw upon educational theory, religious studies, intercultural communication, and Islamic intellectual traditions. Such integration is necessary for developing more comprehensive educational models (Ahmed, 2021; Barrett et al., 2023).

Another limitation concerns the practical implementation of intercultural education within Islamic educational institutions. While many scholars advocate intercultural approaches, fewer studies provide detailed guidance regarding curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, teacher preparation, and assessment practices. Educational innovation requires not only theoretical justification but also practical frameworks capable of supporting implementation. Consequently, further research is needed to identify effective strategies for integrating intercultural competence and religious literacy into Islamic education. Such efforts are essential for ensuring that educational ideals translate into meaningful learning experiences (Jackson, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Against this background, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between Islamic education, intercultural competence, and religious literacy within multicultural societies. Specifically, the study investigates how Islamic educational philosophy can contribute to the development of intercultural competencies and promote religious literacy among learners. Through a systematic review of contemporary literature, the study aims to identify key theoretical foundations, educational opportunities, implementation challenges, and emerging pedagogical approaches. The novelty of the study lies in its development of an integrative framework linking Islamic educational principles, intercultural competence, and religious literacy. By doing so, the research contributes to ongoing efforts to develop inclusive, ethically grounded, and socially relevant educational models for increasingly diverse societies.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is situated at the intersection of Islamic educational philosophy, intercultural competence theory, and religious literacy studies. These three areas have increasingly converged in contemporary educational discourse as societies become more religiously and culturally diverse. While intercultural competence emphasizes the ability to engage effectively across cultural differences, religious literacy focuses on understanding the role of religion in shaping individual and collective identities. Islamic education contributes an ethical and philosophical framework that supports both objectives through its emphasis on knowledge, character formation, dialogue, and social responsibility. The integration of these perspectives provides a comprehensive basis for examining how education can promote peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. Consequently, this study adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that synthesizes insights from these fields (Sahin, 2022; Jackson, 2022).

Intercultural competence has become one of the most influential concepts in contemporary educational research. According to Deardorff (2020), intercultural

competence refers to the ability to communicate and interact appropriately and effectively with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This competence encompasses knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors that facilitate meaningful intercultural engagement. Contemporary scholars emphasize that intercultural competence is not merely a set of technical communication skills but also involves empathy, critical self-reflection, openness, and ethical responsibility. Educational institutions therefore play a crucial role in cultivating these capacities among learners. Such competencies are increasingly regarded as essential for social cohesion and democratic participation in diverse societies (Deardorff, 2020; Barrett et al., 2023).

One of the most widely cited theoretical models of intercultural competence is Deardorff's Process Model of Intercultural Competence. This model conceptualizes intercultural competence as a dynamic and developmental process involving attitudes, knowledge, skills, internal outcomes, and external outcomes. Positive attitudes such as respect, openness, and curiosity serve as the foundation for acquiring intercultural knowledge and skills. These competencies subsequently contribute to internal transformations including adaptability, empathy, and cultural self-awareness. Ultimately, such transformations influence external behaviors and interactions. The model highlights the importance of lifelong learning and continuous intercultural engagement. As a result, it provides a useful framework for understanding how Islamic education can contribute to intercultural development (Deardorff, 2020).

Recent educational research has expanded intercultural competence theory by incorporating perspectives from critical pedagogy and social justice education. Scholars argue that intercultural competence should involve critical examination of power relations, inequality, discrimination, and structural barriers to inclusion. This perspective moves beyond superficial cultural appreciation toward deeper engagement with issues of equity and social responsibility. Educational approaches informed by critical interculturality encourage learners to challenge stereotypes and recognize diverse forms of knowledge. Such perspectives align closely with Islamic ethical principles emphasizing justice (*'adl*) and human dignity (*karāmah*). Therefore, contemporary intercultural competence theory provides important opportunities for dialogue with Islamic educational philosophy (Barrett et al., 2023; Bosio, 2022).

Religious literacy constitutes a second major theoretical pillar of this study. The concept has gained prominence as scholars and policymakers increasingly recognize the importance of religion in public life and social relations. Religious literacy extends beyond knowledge of religious doctrines and rituals. Instead, it involves understanding how religions influence cultural practices, social institutions, political processes, and individual identities. Religious literacy also requires recognition of diversity within religious traditions rather than treating religions as monolithic entities. Educational researchers argue that such understanding is essential for navigating multicultural societies characterized by religious pluralism. Consequently, religious literacy has become a key objective within contemporary citizenship and intercultural education (Moore, 2021; Dinham, 2022).

Moore's theory of religious literacy provides a particularly influential framework for understanding religion within educational contexts. Moore argues that religious literacy involves the ability to analyze religions as dynamic and internally diverse traditions that evolve across historical and cultural contexts. This perspective challenges simplistic representations of religion and encourages critical engagement with religious phenomena. Educational programs informed by religious literacy aim to

develop nuanced understanding rather than promote specific religious beliefs. Such approaches contribute to reducing stereotypes and fostering respectful dialogue. Therefore, religious literacy serves as an important foundation for intercultural understanding and social cohesion (Moore, 2021).

Recent studies demonstrate strong connections between religious literacy and intercultural competence. Scholars increasingly argue that understanding religious diversity is a critical component of intercultural engagement because religion often influences values, identities, and social interactions. Research indicates that individuals with higher levels of religious literacy are generally more capable of engaging constructively with religious differences. Furthermore, religious literacy contributes to empathy by helping learners understand the perspectives and experiences of others. Educational institutions therefore have an important role in promoting religious literacy alongside broader intercultural competencies. These findings highlight the interconnected nature of religious literacy and intercultural learning (Jackson, 2022; Dinham, 2022).

Islamic educational philosophy offers a complementary theoretical perspective for understanding intercultural competence and religious literacy. Traditionally, Islamic education has aimed to cultivate holistic human development encompassing intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Knowledge (*ilm*) occupies a central place within Islamic thought and is viewed as a means of understanding both divine revelation and human society. Educational objectives extend beyond information acquisition to include ethical character formation and social responsibility. Contemporary scholars argue that these characteristics make Islamic educational philosophy particularly relevant for addressing contemporary challenges associated with diversity and globalization. Therefore, Islamic education provides a valuable normative framework for intercultural engagement (Memon, 2021; Sahin, 2022).

A central concept within Islamic educational thought is *ta'āruf*, which refers to mutual knowledge and understanding among diverse communities. Derived from Qur'anic teachings, *ta'āruf* emphasizes that human diversity is a positive and purposeful aspect of creation. Rather than viewing differences as threats, the concept encourages individuals to engage in dialogue and cooperation across social boundaries. Contemporary Islamic scholars increasingly interpret *ta'āruf* as a foundation for intercultural competence and pluralistic citizenship. Educational approaches inspired by this principle seek to cultivate curiosity, respect, and openness toward diversity. Consequently, *ta'āruf* serves as an important theoretical bridge between Islamic education and intercultural learning (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

The principle of human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*) also plays a significant role in Islamic educational theory. The Qur'an affirms the inherent dignity of all human beings regardless of their social, ethnic, or religious backgrounds. Contemporary scholars argue that this principle provides a strong ethical basis for inclusive education and intercultural respect. Educational programs grounded in human dignity encourage learners to value diversity while recognizing shared humanity. Such approaches contribute to reducing prejudice and promoting social inclusion. Therefore, human dignity represents a key conceptual link between Islamic ethics and intercultural competence (Kamali, 2023; Ahmed, 2021).

Another relevant concept is justice (*ādil*), which occupies a central position within Islamic intellectual traditions. Justice encompasses fairness, equity, and respect for the rights of others. Contemporary educational scholars increasingly emphasize

social justice as an essential component of intercultural competence. Educational approaches informed by justice seek to address inequality, discrimination, and exclusion while promoting participation and empowerment. Islamic educational philosophy similarly emphasizes ethical responsibility toward marginalized and vulnerable groups. Consequently, justice provides a shared normative foundation for both Islamic education and intercultural education (Bosio, 2022; Kamali, 2023).

Recent research on Islamic education highlights the importance of dialogue as a pedagogical strategy for fostering intercultural competence. Dialogical education encourages learners to engage critically with different perspectives while developing communication and reflection skills. Studies conducted in multicultural educational environments suggest that dialogue-based learning can enhance empathy, reduce prejudice, and strengthen intercultural understanding. Islamic intellectual traditions contain rich histories of scholarly debate, consultation (*shūrā*), and intellectual exchange. These traditions offer valuable resources for contemporary educational practice. Therefore, dialogue emerges as a significant area of convergence between Islamic pedagogy and intercultural learning theory (Jackson, 2022; Memon, 2021).

The growing literature on Global Citizenship Education (GCED) further reinforces the relevance of intercultural competence within contemporary education. UNESCO identifies intercultural understanding, respect for diversity, and global solidarity as core competencies of global citizenship. Educational initiatives designed to promote global citizenship seek to prepare learners for participation in increasingly interconnected societies. Islamic educational philosophy shares many of these objectives through its emphasis on social responsibility, justice, and concern for the common good. Scholars therefore increasingly explore the relationship between Islamic education and global citizenship frameworks. Such research suggests considerable potential for theoretical integration (UNESCO, 2023; Bosio, 2022).

Empirical studies conducted in Muslim educational contexts provide important insights into the practical implications of these theoretical perspectives. Research indicates that educational programs emphasizing intercultural dialogue and religious literacy can positively influence learners' attitudes toward diversity. Students participating in such programs often demonstrate higher levels of empathy, openness, and civic engagement. Other studies suggest that integrating global and intercultural perspectives into Islamic education enhances learners' ability to navigate multicultural environments. These findings support arguments regarding the compatibility of Islamic education and intercultural competence. However, they also highlight the need for more systematic educational frameworks (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly interest, important gaps remain within the literature. Many studies focus either on religious literacy or intercultural competence without examining their relationship within Islamic educational contexts. Similarly, research on Islamic education often concentrates on identity formation and religious knowledge while paying less attention to intercultural learning outcomes. This fragmentation limits understanding of how Islamic education can contribute to broader societal objectives related to diversity and inclusion. Addressing these gaps requires interdisciplinary frameworks capable of integrating insights from multiple fields. Such integration constitutes an important objective of the present study (Ahmed, 2021; Jackson, 2022).

Another limitation concerns the practical implementation of intercultural educational principles within Islamic educational institutions. Although theoretical support for intercultural competence is increasingly evident, fewer studies provide

detailed guidance regarding curriculum development, teacher preparation, and assessment strategies. Educational innovation requires translating abstract principles into concrete pedagogical practices. Therefore, additional research is necessary to identify effective methods for promoting religious literacy and intercultural competence within diverse educational settings. This challenge remains a significant priority for contemporary Islamic educational scholarship (UNESCO, 2023; Dinham, 2022).

Based on the reviewed literature, this study proposes an Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF) that integrates the principles of *ta'āruf* (mutual understanding), *karāmah* (human dignity), *'adl* (justice), dialogue, critical reflection, and religious literacy. The framework positions intercultural competence not merely as a social skill but as an ethical and educational responsibility grounded in Islamic teachings. By combining contemporary intercultural theories with Islamic educational philosophy, the framework seeks to provide a holistic approach to preparing learners for multicultural societies. It emphasizes cognitive understanding, ethical commitment, social engagement, and reflective practice as interconnected dimensions of educational development. This theoretical synthesis forms the foundation for the methodological and analytical sections of the study and contributes to ongoing discussions concerning the future of Islamic education in diverse societies.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative library research design to examine the relationship between Islamic education, intercultural competence, and religious literacy in multicultural societies. Library research is particularly suitable for studies that seek to investigate conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical issues through a systematic examination of existing scholarly literature. Since the objective of this research was to analyze and synthesize contemporary academic discussions rather than collect primary field data, the study relied on secondary sources obtained from reputable scholarly publications. The approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of various perspectives emerging from Islamic education, intercultural studies, religious literacy, and multicultural education. Furthermore, library research provides opportunities to identify theoretical trends, conceptual gaps, and emerging educational frameworks across different academic disciplines. Therefore, this methodology was considered appropriate for developing a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2020; Snyder, 2019).

The research adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) strategy to ensure methodological rigor and transparency throughout the review process. A systematic review differs from traditional narrative reviews because it follows explicit procedures for identifying, evaluating, selecting, and synthesizing relevant literature. This approach minimizes researcher bias and enhances the reliability of findings. The review was guided by three primary research questions: (1) How is intercultural competence conceptualized within contemporary educational scholarship? (2) What role does religious literacy play in multicultural societies? and (3) How can Islamic education contribute to the development of intercultural competence and religious literacy? These guiding questions structured the literature search, data analysis, and interpretation processes. The systematic review approach is widely recommended for educational research addressing complex interdisciplinary issues (Page et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

The literature included in this study was primarily reflecting recent developments in educational research and policy discourse. The selected timeframe ensured that the study captured contemporary perspectives regarding multicultural education, religious literacy, intercultural competence, and Islamic educational transformation. Sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, conference proceedings, and policy reports published by international organizations. Particular attention was given to literature addressing Islamic education, intercultural communication, global citizenship education, religious diversity, social cohesion, and educational inclusion. To ensure academic quality, sources were retrieved from internationally recognized databases including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. Reports published by UNESCO, OECD, and the Council of Europe were also incorporated because of their relevance to citizenship and intercultural education (UNESCO, 2023; OECD, 2023).

To enhance the quality and relevance of the review, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Publications were included if they addressed at least one of the following themes: Islamic education, intercultural competence, religious literacy, multicultural education, global citizenship education, interfaith dialogue, or educational approaches to diversity. Preference was given to peer-reviewed publications appearing in internationally recognized academic journals. Studies lacking clear scholarly credibility or methodological transparency were excluded from the review. Additionally, publications focusing solely on theological debates without educational relevance were generally omitted unless they contributed significantly to understanding intercultural engagement or religious literacy. This selection process ensured that the reviewed literature remained directly aligned with the objectives of the study while maintaining academic rigor (Booth et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, a qualitative method widely employed in educational and social science research. The analytical process began with multiple readings of the selected literature to identify recurring concepts, themes, and patterns. Initial coding generated categories related to intercultural competence, religious literacy, dialogue, pluralism, social cohesion, justice, human dignity, citizenship, empathy, and multicultural learning. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader thematic clusters that reflected major conceptual relationships within the literature. The iterative nature of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to refine categories continuously and identify deeper theoretical connections among the reviewed studies. Consequently, thematic content analysis facilitated a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic education intersects with intercultural competence and religious literacy (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Neuendorf, 2020).

To strengthen the validity and comprehensiveness of the findings, the study employed conceptual triangulation. Conceptual triangulation involves integrating multiple theoretical perspectives to examine a phenomenon from different analytical angles. In this research, perspectives from Islamic educational philosophy, intercultural competence theory, religious literacy studies, multicultural education, and global citizenship education were synthesized. This strategy enabled a richer interpretation of the literature while reducing the limitations associated with reliance on a single theoretical lens. Furthermore, triangulation helped identify areas of convergence and divergence among different scholarly traditions. Through this process, the study generated a more nuanced and comprehensive framework for understanding the

educational significance of intercultural competence and religious literacy within Islamic education (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2020).

The final stage of the research involved synthesizing the analyzed literature into a conceptual model termed the Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF). This framework emerged from the integration of Islamic educational principles, intercultural competence theory, and contemporary religious literacy scholarship. The framework positions mutual understanding (*ta'āruf*), human dignity (*karāmah*), justice (*'adl*), dialogue, critical reflection, empathy, and civic responsibility as interconnected dimensions of educational development. Rather than treating religious literacy and intercultural competence as separate educational objectives, the framework conceptualizes them as mutually reinforcing competencies that support social cohesion and inclusive citizenship. The IIRLF serves as the primary theoretical contribution of the study and provides the foundation for interpreting the findings presented in the following section. Through this synthesis, the study seeks to advance scholarly understanding of how Islamic education can contribute to multicultural societies characterized by diversity and pluralism (Kamali, 2023; Jackson, 2022).

Findings and Discussion

Emerging Contributions of Islamic Education to Intercultural Competence and Religious Literacy

The systematic review revealed a growing scholarly consensus that Islamic education possesses significant potential for promoting intercultural competence and religious literacy in multicultural societies. Across the reviewed literature, researchers increasingly emphasize that contemporary Islamic education should move beyond narrow approaches focused exclusively on doctrinal transmission. Instead, educational institutions are encouraged to prepare learners for constructive engagement with cultural, religious, and ideological diversity. Such a shift reflects broader educational transformations associated with globalization, migration, and social pluralism. The findings suggest that Islamic educational traditions contain numerous ethical and pedagogical resources capable of supporting intercultural learning. Consequently, Islamic education can contribute meaningfully to social cohesion and inclusive citizenship in diverse societies (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the literature is the role of *ta'āruf* as a foundational principle for intercultural engagement. Derived from Qur'anic teachings, *ta'āruf* emphasizes mutual recognition, understanding, and learning among diverse communities. Contemporary scholars interpret this concept as an ethical framework for dialogue and intercultural cooperation. Educational approaches grounded in *ta'āruf* encourage learners to view diversity as a source of enrichment rather than division. Such perspectives align closely with modern theories of intercultural competence, which emphasize openness, curiosity, and respect toward cultural differences. Therefore, *ta'āruf* provides a significant conceptual bridge between Islamic educational philosophy and contemporary intercultural education (Kamali, 2023; Sahin, 2022).

The findings also highlight the importance of religious literacy as a critical educational objective in multicultural societies. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that misunderstanding and misinformation regarding religion contribute to prejudice, stereotypes, and social tensions. Religious literacy helps learners develop more accurate and nuanced understandings of religious traditions and their social

significance. Furthermore, religious literacy promotes awareness of diversity both between and within religious communities. Educational programs incorporating religious literacy often encourage critical reflection and informed dialogue rather than simplistic representations of religious identity. Consequently, religious literacy serves as an important foundation for intercultural competence and social harmony (Moore, 2021; Dinham, 2022).

Another important finding concerns the relationship between Islamic education and human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*). The reviewed literature consistently identifies human dignity as a central ethical principle within Islamic thought. This principle affirms the inherent worth of every individual regardless of cultural, ethnic, or religious background. Educational programs grounded in human dignity encourage respect, empathy, and inclusive attitudes toward diversity. Such approaches contribute positively to intercultural understanding by emphasizing common humanity while recognizing cultural differences. Therefore, human dignity emerges as a key ethical foundation for intercultural competence within Islamic educational contexts (Kamali, 2023; Ahmed, 2021).

The review further demonstrates that dialogue-oriented pedagogies play an essential role in fostering intercultural competence. Studies conducted across diverse educational settings suggest that structured dialogue enables learners to engage critically and respectfully with different perspectives. Dialogue-based learning encourages active listening, empathy, self-reflection, and collaborative problem-solving. Islamic intellectual traditions provide substantial support for such pedagogical approaches through historical practices of scholarly debate, consultation (*shūrā*), and intellectual exchange. These traditions challenge assumptions that religious education necessarily promotes exclusivism or social isolation. Instead, they demonstrate the compatibility of Islamic educational principles with dialogical learning approaches (Jackson, 2022; Memon, 2021).

The findings additionally indicate that Islamic education can contribute significantly to the development of ethical citizenship. Contemporary citizenship education increasingly emphasizes not only political participation but also intercultural understanding, social responsibility, and ethical engagement. Islamic educational philosophy similarly stresses accountability, justice, compassion, and concern for the common good. These shared values provide opportunities for integrating Islamic education and citizenship education within multicultural societies. Educational programs informed by these principles can strengthen learners' capacity to participate constructively in diverse democratic communities. Consequently, ethical citizenship emerges as an important outcome of intercultural Islamic education (Bosio, 2022; UNESCO, 2023).

Another recurring theme involves the importance of critical reflection in the development of religious literacy. The literature suggests that effective religious literacy requires more than factual knowledge about religious traditions. Learners must also develop the ability to analyze religious phenomena critically, recognize internal diversity, and examine their own assumptions. Critical reflection helps prevent essentialist understandings of religion and promotes deeper intercultural understanding. Contemporary Islamic educational scholars increasingly advocate pedagogical approaches that combine religious commitment with critical inquiry. Such approaches support both intellectual development and intercultural competence (Sahin, 2022; Moore, 2021).

Research findings also indicate that educational approaches emphasizing intercultural competence can help address contemporary challenges such as religious intolerance, discrimination, and Islamophobia. Learners exposed to intercultural and religious literacy programs often demonstrate greater empathy and willingness to engage with diversity. These outcomes contribute positively to social cohesion and conflict prevention. In multicultural societies, such competencies are increasingly necessary for maintaining peaceful coexistence. Therefore, intercultural education represents an important strategy for addressing social divisions and fostering mutual understanding (Dinham, 2022; Jackson, 2022).

The literature further highlights the role of teacher preparation in promoting intercultural competence and religious literacy. Educators serve as key mediators between educational philosophies and classroom practice. However, many teachers receive limited training in intercultural pedagogy, religious diversity, or dialogue-based instruction. Studies suggest that professional development programs focusing on these areas can significantly improve educational outcomes. Consequently, teacher education emerges as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of intercultural Islamic education. Without adequately prepared educators, theoretical frameworks may remain difficult to implement in practice (UNESCO, 2023; Barrett et al., 2023).

The findings also reveal that curriculum design plays a crucial role in supporting intercultural learning. Traditional curricula sometimes present religious traditions in isolated or monolithic ways that fail to reflect their diversity and complexity. Contemporary scholars advocate integrated curricula that connect religious literacy, intercultural competence, ethical citizenship, and global awareness. Such curricula encourage learners to engage with real-world issues while developing respect for diversity. Islamic educational institutions adopting these approaches may be better positioned to prepare learners for multicultural societies. Therefore, curriculum innovation constitutes an important dimension of educational reform (Jackson, 2022; Bosio, 2022).

The review also demonstrates that intercultural competence contributes significantly to the development of social cohesion in multicultural societies. Social cohesion refers to the capacity of diverse communities to maintain harmonious relationships while respecting cultural, ethnic, and religious differences. Contemporary educational scholars argue that intercultural competence strengthens social cohesion by fostering trust, empathy, and mutual understanding. Islamic educational principles similarly emphasize solidarity (*ukhuwwah*), cooperation (*ta'āwun*), and peaceful coexistence. Educational programs that integrate these values can help learners develop positive attitudes toward diversity and reduce social polarization. Consequently, social cohesion emerges as a key outcome of intercultural Islamic education (UNESCO, 2023; Kamali, 2023).

Another important finding concerns the growing significance of multicultural citizenship. Modern societies increasingly require citizens who can engage constructively with cultural and religious diversity while maintaining commitment to democratic values and social responsibility. Islamic education can contribute to this objective by cultivating ethical awareness, civic engagement, and respect for human dignity. The reviewed literature indicates that learners exposed to citizenship-oriented Islamic education demonstrate stronger commitment to social participation and community service. These findings challenge assumptions that religious education is incompatible with democratic citizenship. Instead, they suggest that Islamic educational

traditions can enrich contemporary citizenship education frameworks (Bosio, 2022; Memon, 2021).

The literature further highlights the importance of addressing intra-religious diversity within religious literacy education. Religious traditions are often presented as homogeneous entities despite their internal diversity and complexity. Such representations may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and limit learners' understanding of religious communities. Contemporary scholars emphasize that effective religious literacy should acknowledge multiple interpretations, practices, and historical developments within religious traditions. Islamic education informed by this perspective can help learners appreciate diversity within Islam itself while developing broader intercultural understanding. Consequently, recognition of intra-religious diversity constitutes an important component of religious literacy (Moore, 2021; Dinham, 2022).

The findings also reveal that empathy plays a central role in both intercultural competence and Islamic educational philosophy. Empathy enables individuals to understand and appreciate the experiences and perspectives of others. Educational approaches promoting empathy encourage learners to engage with diversity in respectful and meaningful ways. Islamic teachings emphasizing compassion (*rahmah*) provide a strong ethical foundation for empathy-based learning. Studies indicate that educational interventions designed to foster empathy contribute positively to intercultural understanding and conflict reduction. Therefore, empathy emerges as a crucial educational objective within the proposed framework (Sahin, 2022; Ahmed, 2021).

Another recurring theme concerns the influence of globalization and digital communication on intercultural learning. Digital technologies have expanded opportunities for interaction among individuals from diverse backgrounds while simultaneously increasing exposure to misinformation and prejudice. Educational institutions must therefore prepare learners to navigate digital environments responsibly and critically. Religious literacy and intercultural competence are increasingly important within digital contexts because online interactions frequently involve cultural and religious differences. Islamic educational approaches emphasizing ethical communication and critical reflection can contribute significantly to digital citizenship development. Consequently, digital literacy and intercultural competence should be viewed as complementary educational priorities (Selwyn, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

The review additionally suggests that intercultural competence contributes to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Many contemporary conflicts involve cultural, ethnic, or religious dimensions that are often exacerbated by misunderstanding and prejudice. Educational programs fostering intercultural understanding can help learners develop skills necessary for peaceful conflict resolution and dialogue. Islamic educational traditions emphasizing justice, reconciliation, and compassion provide valuable resources for peace education initiatives. The literature indicates that learners exposed to intercultural and peace-oriented educational programs often exhibit more positive attitudes toward diversity and cooperation. Therefore, intercultural Islamic education can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding efforts (Jackson, 2022; Tarozzi & Mallon, 2023).

Research findings further indicate that inclusive pedagogical approaches are particularly effective in promoting religious literacy. Inclusive pedagogy encourages active participation, collaborative learning, and engagement with multiple perspectives.

Such approaches help learners appreciate diversity while maintaining critical awareness and intellectual rigor. Islamic educational institutions adopting inclusive pedagogies are better positioned to prepare students for participation in multicultural societies. Furthermore, inclusive learning environments contribute positively to learners' sense of belonging and social responsibility. Consequently, pedagogical inclusivity emerges as an essential component of educational transformation (Barrett et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

The literature also reveals the importance of ethical leadership within multicultural educational contexts. Educational leaders influence institutional culture, curriculum development, and educational priorities. Leaders committed to intercultural competence and religious literacy can create environments that support dialogue, inclusion, and mutual respect. Islamic educational traditions emphasize leadership as a trust (*amānah*) involving responsibility and accountability. These principles align closely with contemporary discussions regarding ethical leadership in education. Therefore, educational leadership plays a crucial role in advancing intercultural and religious literacy initiatives (Memon, 2021; Kamali, 2023).

Another important finding concerns the need for curriculum integration. Intercultural competence and religious literacy are often treated as supplementary topics rather than core educational objectives. The reviewed studies suggest that integrating these themes across multiple subject areas can enhance educational effectiveness. Such integration encourages learners to connect religious, cultural, ethical, and social issues within broader educational experiences. Islamic educational institutions can benefit from interdisciplinary curricula that link religious knowledge with contemporary societal challenges. Consequently, curriculum integration represents an important strategy for educational innovation (Jackson, 2022; Bosio, 2022).

Finally, the literature demonstrates that Islamic education possesses considerable potential to contribute to the development of inclusive and pluralistic societies. By emphasizing mutual understanding, justice, dignity, dialogue, and ethical responsibility, Islamic educational philosophy supports many of the goals associated with intercultural competence and religious literacy. The challenge lies not in identifying compatible principles but in translating them into effective educational practices. This finding underscores the importance of developing comprehensive frameworks capable of guiding educational transformation. Therefore, the proposed Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF) seeks to address this need by integrating contemporary educational theories with Islamic ethical principles (Sahin, 2022; Kamali, 2023).

Table 1. Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF)

Islamic Educational Principle	Educational Dimension	Intercultural Competence Outcome	Religious Literacy Outcome	Societal Contribution
Ta'āruf (Mutual Understanding)	Dialogue and interaction	Openness toward diversity	Understanding different faith traditions	Social harmony

Islamic Educational Principle	Educational Dimension	Intercultural Competence Outcome	Religious Literacy Outcome	Societal Contribution
Karāmah (Human Dignity)	Ethical education	Respect for others	Recognition of equal human worth	Inclusion and equity
‘Adl (Justice)	Social responsibility	Fairness and empathy	Ethical engagement with diversity	Social cohesion
Raḥmah (Compassion)	Character development	Empathetic communication	Positive attitudes toward religious diversity	Conflict reduction
Shūrā (Consultation)	Participatory learning	Collaborative problem-solving	Respectful dialogue	Democratic participation
‘Ilm (Knowledge)	Intellectual development	Critical cultural awareness	Deep religious understanding	Informed citizenship
Tafakkur (Reflection)	Critical thinking	Self-awareness	Critical religious literacy	Reflective citizenship
Ukhuwwah (Solidarity)	Community engagement	Intergroup cooperation	Respectful coexistence	Community resilience
Amānah (Responsibility)	Ethical leadership	Responsible intercultural behavior	Ethical application of religious knowledge	Civic responsibility
Ta‘āwun (Cooperation)	Collaborative learning	Intercultural teamwork	Shared learning across differences	Sustainable multicultural societies

The proposed IIRLF demonstrates that Islamic educational philosophy offers a comprehensive foundation for promoting intercultural competence and religious literacy. Rather than viewing religious education and intercultural learning as separate educational domains, the framework integrates them within a holistic vision of human development. This integration reflects the traditional Islamic understanding that education encompasses intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions. Consequently, learners are encouraged not only to acquire knowledge but also to develop ethical dispositions and social responsibilities. Such an approach is particularly relevant in multicultural societies characterized by increasing diversity and complexity (Sahin, 2022; Memon, 2021).

The principle of *ta'aruf* occupies a central position within the framework because it directly addresses the educational challenge of engaging with diversity. Contemporary intercultural competence theories emphasize openness, curiosity, and dialogue as essential competencies for intercultural engagement. Similarly, *ta'aruf* encourages individuals to learn from one another and appreciate cultural differences as opportunities for mutual enrichment. Educational programs grounded in this principle can foster constructive attitudes toward diversity while reducing prejudice and stereotyping. Therefore, *ta'aruf* serves as a foundational concept linking Islamic education and intercultural competence (Kamali, 2023; Deardorff, 2020).

Human dignity (*karāmah*) further strengthens the framework by providing an ethical basis for inclusion and respect. Recognition of human dignity encourages learners to value every individual regardless of cultural or religious background. Such perspectives are essential for combating discrimination and promoting social cohesion. Contemporary educational theories similarly identify respect for human dignity as a cornerstone of democratic and inclusive education. Consequently, *karāmah* contributes significantly to the ethical dimensions of intercultural competence and religious literacy (Ahmed, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

Justice (*'adl*) represents another critical component of the framework. Educational approaches emphasizing justice encourage learners to recognize and challenge inequalities affecting individuals and communities. Such perspectives align with contemporary theories of critical interculturality that emphasize social responsibility and equity. Islamic teachings regarding justice provide a strong moral foundation for these objectives. Therefore, justice-oriented education can help learners engage with diversity in ways that promote fairness and inclusion (Bosio, 2022; Kamali, 2023).

The framework also highlights the importance of compassion (*rahmah*) in intercultural interactions. Compassion encourages empathy, understanding, and concern for the well-being of others. Educational interventions promoting compassion can contribute positively to conflict resolution and social harmony. Islamic educational traditions emphasize compassion as a fundamental virtue guiding human relationships. Consequently, compassion represents a crucial element of intercultural competence within Islamic educational contexts (Ahmed, 2021; Sahin, 2022).

Knowledge (*'ilm*) and reflection (*tafakkur*) occupy equally important positions within the framework. Religious literacy requires learners to develop accurate and nuanced understandings of religious traditions while critically examining assumptions and stereotypes. Critical reflection helps learners engage thoughtfully with complexity and diversity. These competencies are increasingly necessary in societies where misinformation and polarization remain significant challenges. Therefore, intellectual

development serves as a key pillar of both intercultural competence and religious literacy (Moore, 2021; Dinham, 2022).

The framework additionally emphasizes solidarity (*ukhuwwah*) and cooperation (*ta'āwun*) as essential dimensions of social engagement. Intercultural competence involves not only understanding diversity but also working collaboratively across differences. Educational experiences fostering cooperation can strengthen trust, communication, and collective problem-solving abilities. Such competencies contribute directly to social cohesion and community resilience. Consequently, solidarity and cooperation represent important outcomes of intercultural Islamic education (UNESCO, 2023; Jackson, 2022).

Leadership and responsibility are also central to the framework. Educational institutions must prepare learners to assume active roles within diverse communities. The concept of *amānah* highlights the ethical responsibilities associated with leadership and citizenship. Learners who understand leadership as a form of service are more likely to engage constructively with social challenges. Therefore, ethical leadership constitutes an important educational objective within multicultural societies (Memon, 2021; Kamali, 2023).

The framework further suggests that effective implementation requires curriculum reform, teacher preparation, and institutional commitment. Educational innovation cannot be achieved solely through theoretical development. Practical strategies are necessary to ensure that intercultural competence and religious literacy become integral components of educational experiences. Such efforts require collaboration among policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders. Therefore, institutional transformation is essential for realizing the framework's objectives (Barrett et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

Ultimately, the IIRLF provides a comprehensive model for understanding how Islamic education can contribute to multicultural societies. By integrating intercultural competence, religious literacy, and Islamic ethical principles, the framework offers a culturally grounded yet globally relevant approach to education. Its primary contribution lies in demonstrating that Islamic educational traditions possess substantial resources for promoting inclusion, dialogue, and social cohesion. As societies continue to become more diverse, such educational frameworks will become increasingly important for fostering peaceful coexistence and responsible citizenship (Sahin, 2022; Jackson, 2022).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Islamic education possesses significant potential to promote intercultural competence and religious literacy in multicultural societies. Through the systematic review of contemporary literature, the findings reveal substantial alignment between Islamic educational principles and contemporary theories of intercultural education, religious literacy, and global citizenship. Core Islamic concepts such as *ta'āruf* (mutual understanding), *karāmah* (human dignity), *'adl* (justice), *rahmah* (compassion), and *ta'āwun* (cooperation) provide strong ethical foundations for fostering respectful engagement with diversity. The study further shows that religious literacy and intercultural competence are mutually reinforcing educational objectives that contribute to social cohesion, inclusive citizenship, and peaceful coexistence. Consequently, Islamic education can play an important role in addressing contemporary challenges associated with religious diversity, cultural pluralism, and social fragmentation.

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the Islamic Intercultural Religious Literacy Framework (IIRLF), which integrates Islamic educational philosophy with contemporary intercultural competence and religious literacy theories. The framework provides a holistic model that combines intellectual development, ethical formation, critical reflection, dialogue, and civic responsibility. Its novelty lies in offering an interdisciplinary conceptual approach that bridges Islamic educational traditions and contemporary multicultural educational needs. Future research should examine the practical implementation of this framework through empirical studies involving curriculum development, teacher education, and classroom practice. Ultimately, the study concludes that Islamic education can serve as a powerful educational resource for preparing learners to participate responsibly, ethically, and constructively within increasingly diverse global societies.

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