



## ENHANCING SOCIAL HARMONY THROUGH INTERFAITH INTERACTION IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS

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**Abstract:** Interfaith interaction plays a significant role in fostering social harmony in pluralistic societies. In the context of Islamic boarding schools, engagement with diverse communities provides an important opportunity to develop tolerance and inclusive attitudes among students. This study aims to examine how interfaith interaction contributes to strengthening social harmony and religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. This study employed a qualitative approach within a community service framework, focusing on students' interaction with communities of different religious backgrounds. The activities included social engagement, community-based interaction, and participation in shared social environments that encouraged dialogue and mutual understanding. The findings indicate that interfaith interaction significantly enhances students' tolerance, empathy, and social awareness. Direct engagement with diverse communities enables students to reduce prejudice, develop mutual respect, and build inclusive perspectives. The results also show that continuous social interaction plays a crucial role in transforming abstract concepts of moderation into practical social behavior. This study concludes that interfaith interaction is an effective approach to promoting social harmony and religious moderation in Islamic educational settings. The findings provide practical implications for developing community-based programs that encourage dialogue, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

**Keywords:** interfaith interaction, social harmony, religious moderation, Islamic boarding schools, pluralism

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## INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected and pluralistic world, the challenge of maintaining social harmony has become more complex, particularly in societies characterized by religious and cultural diversity. Differences in belief systems, identities, and social practices often create the potential for misunderstanding, prejudice, and conflict. In this context, the promotion of tolerance, inclusivity, and

mutual respect is not only a social necessity but also an educational imperative. Educational institutions play a crucial role in preparing individuals to navigate diversity constructively and to contribute to peaceful coexistence in society.

Indonesia represents a unique example of a pluralistic society where multiple religions, cultures, and ethnic groups coexist within a shared national framework. While this diversity is a source of richness, it also presents challenges related to social cohesion and intergroup relations. Issues such as religious intolerance, exclusivism, and social polarization continue to emerge in various contexts, highlighting the need for effective strategies to promote harmony and understanding. In response to these challenges, the concept of religious moderation has gained prominence as an approach that emphasizes balance, tolerance, and inclusivity in religious life (Abdullah, 2020).

One of the most effective approaches to fostering social harmony is through direct interaction between individuals from different backgrounds. Interfaith interaction, in particular, provides opportunities for individuals to engage with diversity in meaningful ways, allowing them to move beyond stereotypes and develop mutual understanding. This approach is grounded in intergroup contact theory, which posits that interaction between members of different groups can reduce prejudice and improve relationships, especially when the interaction is sustained and cooperative (Allport, 1954).

Subsequent research has reinforced this perspective by demonstrating that meaningful and structured intergroup contact leads to positive attitudinal change, reduced social distance, and increased trust among participants (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). These findings suggest that interfaith interaction is not merely a social activity but a powerful mechanism for transforming perceptions and fostering inclusive attitudes.

In the context of Islamic education, particularly within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), interfaith interaction offers a unique and valuable opportunity for experiential learning. Although *pesantren* are traditionally rooted in strong religious values and internal community life, their engagement with surrounding communities allows students to encounter diversity in real-world settings. This interaction enables students to apply abstract concepts of tolerance and moderation in practical contexts, thereby enhancing their understanding and internalization of these values.

Furthermore, interfaith interaction aligns with broader educational goals that emphasize the development of social competence, empathy, and critical awareness. Through engagement with individuals from different religious backgrounds, students learn to communicate respectfully, appreciate differences, and build constructive relationships. These competencies are essential for maintaining social harmony in diverse societies and reflect the transformative potential of education in shaping inclusive and responsible citizens.

Therefore, understanding the role of interfaith interaction in promoting social harmony within Islamic boarding schools becomes an important area of inquiry. By examining how direct engagement with diverse communities influences students' attitudes and behavior, this study seeks to contribute to the development

of effective educational strategies for fostering religious moderation and peaceful coexistence.

Building upon the importance of interfaith interaction, theoretical perspectives on pluralism and interfaith dialogue provide a deeper understanding of how social harmony can be cultivated in diverse societies. Pluralism, in this context, is not merely the coexistence of different religious groups but an active engagement with diversity that fosters mutual recognition and respect. It requires individuals to move beyond tolerance as passive acceptance toward a more dynamic process of dialogue, cooperation, and shared understanding (Berger, 2014).

Interfaith dialogue plays a central role in operationalizing pluralism by creating spaces for communication and exchange between individuals of different religious backgrounds. Through dialogue, participants are able to articulate their beliefs, understand others' perspectives, and identify common values that support peaceful coexistence. This process contributes to the reduction of prejudice and the strengthening of social bonds. Fox (2013) emphasizes that in modern societies, the interaction between religion and public life necessitates constructive engagement to prevent conflict and promote stability.

In addition, the concept of social capital provides further insight into how interfaith interaction contributes to social harmony. Social capital refers to the networks, trust, and norms that facilitate cooperation within and between groups (Putnam, 2007). Interfaith interaction strengthens bridging social capital, which connects individuals across different social and religious boundaries. This form of social capital is particularly important in pluralistic societies, as it fosters trust and collaboration among diverse groups.

Within educational settings, the development of social capital is closely linked to students' experiences of interaction and participation. When students engage in interfaith activities, they build relationships that extend beyond their immediate community, thereby enhancing their capacity to function in diverse social environments. These experiences contribute to the development of inclusive identities and reduce tendencies toward exclusivism.

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) offer a distinctive context for examining the role of interfaith interaction in education. Traditionally, *pesantren* are characterized by strong internal values, close teacher-student relationships, and a focus on religious learning. However, many *pesantren* are also embedded within broader social environments that include communities of different religious backgrounds. This positioning creates opportunities for students to interact with diversity while maintaining their religious identity.

The integration of community engagement within *pesantren* education further enhances the potential for interfaith interaction. Through community service programs and social activities, students are exposed to real-life situations that require cooperation, communication, and mutual understanding. These experiences provide a practical context for applying the values of tolerance and moderation that are taught within the classroom.

Moreover, the experiential nature of interfaith interaction aligns with contemporary educational approaches that emphasize active learning and real-

world engagement. Students learn not only through instruction but also through participation, reflection, and interaction. This experiential learning process enables students to internalize values more deeply, as they are directly involved in situations that require them to practice these values.

Therefore, the combination of pluralism, interfaith dialogue, and social capital provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding how interfaith interaction contributes to social harmony. Within the pesantren context, these elements are integrated through educational practices that combine religious instruction with community engagement, creating a holistic approach to value internalization.

Despite the growing body of literature on religious moderation, pluralism, and interfaith dialogue, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these concepts are operationalized within Islamic educational settings, particularly through direct social interaction. Many existing studies focus on normative, theological, or policy-based approaches to promoting religious moderation, emphasizing curriculum design, institutional frameworks, or doctrinal perspectives. While these approaches are important, they often overlook the practical mechanisms through which students experience and internalize moderation values in their daily lives.

Specifically, research on Islamic boarding schools has predominantly highlighted their role in character education, religious transmission, and institutional culture. However, limited attention has been given to how students' direct engagement with diverse communities contributes to the development of inclusive attitudes and social competencies. In particular, the role of interfaith interaction as a community-based educational strategy remains underexplored. This gap indicates the need for a more practice-oriented analysis that focuses on students' lived experiences rather than solely on institutional or theoretical dimensions.

Furthermore, while intergroup contact theory provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding the benefits of interaction across differences, its application within Islamic educational contexts has not been sufficiently examined. Most empirical studies on intergroup contact have been conducted in Western or secular settings, leaving a gap in knowledge regarding how such interactions function within religious educational environments such as pesantren. This raises important questions about how interfaith interaction can be adapted to align with religious values while still promoting openness and inclusivity.

Another gap identified in the literature relates to the integration of community service approaches in promoting religious moderation. Although community-based programs have been recognized as effective in fostering social engagement, there is limited research that examines how these programs facilitate interfaith interaction and contribute to long-term behavioral change among students. Understanding this relationship is crucial for developing sustainable educational strategies that go beyond short-term interventions.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine how interfaith interaction contributes to enhancing social harmony and strengthening religious moderation among students in Islamic boarding schools. The study focuses on students' direct engagement with diverse communities through community service activities and explores how these interactions influence their attitudes, perceptions, and behavior.

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it extends existing frameworks by integrating intergroup contact theory, pluralism, and social capital within the context of Islamic education. Practically, it provides insights into how community-based interfaith interaction can be implemented as an effective strategy for fostering tolerance, reducing prejudice, and promoting inclusive social behavior.

By emphasizing the role of direct social engagement, this study contributes to the development of a more grounded and experiential approach to religious moderation. It highlights that meaningful interaction, rather than abstract instruction alone, plays a crucial role in shaping students' perspectives and behavior. In this way, the study provides a valuable framework for educational institutions seeking to promote social harmony in increasingly diverse societies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach within a community service framework to explore the role of interfaith interaction in promoting social harmony and religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative design was selected to allow an in-depth understanding of students' experiences, perceptions, and behavioral changes resulting from direct engagement with diverse communities. This approach is particularly suitable for examining complex social phenomena that involve interaction, meaning-making, and contextual interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study was conducted in Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) environments that are socially connected to surrounding communities with diverse religious backgrounds. These settings provide a unique context where students can engage with individuals from different faith traditions while maintaining their own religious identity. The integration of formal education and community interaction allows for a holistic learning process in which students experience diversity in real-life situations.

Participants in this study consisted of students (*santri*) who actively participated in interfaith interaction activities. The selection of participants was carried out using purposive sampling, focusing on students who were directly involved in community service programs that facilitated interaction with individuals from different religious backgrounds. This sampling strategy ensured that the participants had relevant experience and could provide meaningful insights into the research focus (Patton, 2015).

The interfaith interaction program was designed as a structured community service activity that emphasized direct engagement, collaboration, and dialogue. The program included several stages: initial planning, implementation, and

evaluation. During the planning stage, activities were designed to create opportunities for meaningful interaction, such as participation in community events, collaborative social projects, and informal dialogue sessions. These activities were intended to encourage students to engage with diversity in a constructive and respectful manner.

The implementation stage involved students' active participation in interfaith interaction activities within the community. Students interacted with individuals from different religious backgrounds through shared social experiences, including cooperation in community initiatives and participation in public events. These interactions were guided by principles of mutual respect, equality, and openness to ensure a positive and meaningful experience for all participants.

The evaluation stage focused on assessing the outcomes of the interaction, particularly in terms of changes in students' attitudes, perceptions, and behavior. This stage provided important insights into how interfaith interaction contributes to the development of tolerance, empathy, and social awareness. By structuring the program into these stages, the study ensures a systematic approach to examining the role of interfaith interaction in promoting social harmony.

Through this design, the study aims to capture the dynamic processes through which interfaith interaction influences students' understanding of diversity and contributes to the internalization of moderation values in Islamic boarding school settings.

Data collection in this study was conducted using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of interfaith interaction processes and their impact on students. The techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The use of multiple data sources aimed to enhance the richness of the data and to capture different dimensions of students' experiences within the interfaith interaction program (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Observation was carried out during the implementation of interfaith interaction activities, including community engagement, collaborative projects, and informal dialogue sessions. Through observation, the researcher examined students' behavior, communication patterns, and responses during interaction with individuals from different religious backgrounds. This method allowed for direct insight into how students engage with diversity in real-life situations.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in greater depth. Interviews with students focused on their perceptions of interfaith interaction, changes in attitudes, and challenges encountered during the program. Additionally, interviews with community members were conducted to gain insights into their experiences of interacting with students and their perceptions of the program's impact. This approach enabled the collection of detailed and nuanced data that reflect the lived experiences of participants (Seidman, 2013).

Document analysis was used to complement the data obtained from observation and interviews. Relevant documents, such as program reports, activity records, and institutional guidelines, were analyzed to understand the

structure and implementation of interfaith interaction activities. This method also provided supporting evidence for triangulating the findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process consisted of several stages: data familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. Codes were generated based on recurring patterns related to students' attitudes, interaction experiences, and behavioral changes. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that represent key aspects of interfaith interaction and its impact on social harmony.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, and reflexivity. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from multiple sources and methods to ensure consistency and credibility. Prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of the context and to build trust with participants, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the data.

Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research process by critically reflecting on the researcher's role, assumptions, and potential biases (Berger, 2015). This practice ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' experiences rather than influenced by subjective interpretation.

In addition, the study adopted criteria of qualitative rigor, including credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was ensured through careful data collection and validation, dependability through systematic documentation of research procedures, and confirmability through the use of evidence-based analysis. These measures strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings and ensure that the results accurately reflect the role of interfaith interaction in promoting social harmony.

Overall, the combination of diverse data collection methods, systematic analysis, and rigorous validation procedures ensures that the findings of this study are robust, credible, and reflective of real-world educational practices.

## **RESULTS**

### **1. Reduction of Prejudice through Direct Interfaith Interaction**

The findings of this study indicate that interfaith interaction plays a significant role in reducing prejudice among students in Islamic boarding schools. Prior to participating in the program, many students had limited exposure to individuals from different religious backgrounds, which contributed to the formation of assumptions, stereotypes, and social distance. These initial perceptions were largely shaped by indirect information rather than direct experience.

Through structured and continuous interfaith interaction, students were able to engage directly with individuals from diverse religious communities. This direct engagement provided opportunities for students to observe, communicate, and collaborate with others in real-life contexts. As a result, students began to reassess their initial assumptions and develop more nuanced and informed perspectives.

The findings reveal that meaningful interaction – characterized by cooperation, shared activities, and open communication – significantly contributed to reducing negative stereotypes. Students reported feeling more comfortable interacting with individuals from different religious backgrounds and expressed a greater willingness to engage in dialogue. This transformation reflects the core principles of intergroup contact theory, which suggests that sustained and positive interaction reduces prejudice and improves intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Furthermore, the reduction of prejudice was not limited to cognitive changes but also extended to emotional responses. Students who initially felt hesitant or uncertain became more confident and open in their interactions. This shift indicates that interfaith interaction influences both attitudes and feelings, creating a more comprehensive transformation in students' perceptions.

The findings also highlight that the quality of interaction plays a crucial role in determining its effectiveness. Interactions that involve equal participation, mutual respect, and shared goals are more likely to produce positive outcomes. In contrast, superficial or one-sided interactions have limited impact on reducing prejudice. This underscores the importance of designing interfaith programs that emphasize meaningful engagement rather than mere exposure.

In addition, the study found that repeated interaction reinforces the reduction of prejudice over time. Students who participated in multiple activities demonstrated more consistent positive attitudes compared to those with limited exposure. This suggests that the sustainability of interfaith interaction is essential for achieving long-term impact.

The reduction of prejudice observed in this study serves as a foundational outcome that supports the development of other aspects of social harmony, including empathy, communication, and inclusive behavior. By addressing negative perceptions at the initial stage, interfaith interaction creates a conducive environment for deeper value internalization, which is further explored in the following sections.

## 2. Development of Empathy and Mutual Respect through Interfaith Engagement

The findings further demonstrate that interfaith interaction significantly contributes to the development of empathy and mutual respect among students. Following the reduction of initial prejudice, students began to engage more openly and meaningfully with individuals from different religious backgrounds. This deeper level of engagement allowed them to better understand the perspectives, values, and lived experiences of others.

Through direct communication and shared activities, students developed the ability to see situations from different viewpoints. This process of perspective-taking is a key component of empathy, enabling individuals to appreciate differences without judgment. The findings indicate that students who actively participated in interfaith interaction activities showed increased sensitivity toward the feelings and experiences of others, which is essential for fostering harmonious relationships in diverse societies.

The development of empathy was particularly evident in students' responses during social interaction. Students demonstrated greater patience, willingness to listen, and openness in dialogue. They became more attentive to how their words and actions might affect others, reflecting a shift toward more considerate and inclusive behavior. This transformation aligns with social psychological perspectives that emphasize the role of interaction in developing empathy and prosocial attitudes.

In addition, mutual respect emerged as a key outcome of interfaith interaction. Students began to recognize the legitimacy of different religious beliefs and practices, even when they differed from their own. Rather than perceiving these differences as sources of conflict, students increasingly viewed them as opportunities for learning and mutual enrichment. This shift indicates a move from exclusivist attitudes toward a more inclusive and pluralistic orientation.

The findings also suggest that empathy and respect are reinforced through repeated and sustained interaction. Students who engaged in ongoing activities demonstrated stronger and more consistent attitudes of respect compared to those with limited exposure. This highlights the importance of continuity in interfaith programs, as sustained engagement allows for deeper relational bonds and more meaningful understanding.

Furthermore, the development of empathy and mutual respect contributes to the strengthening of social cohesion within the broader community. Students who cultivate these values are more likely to engage positively with others, build constructive relationships, and contribute to a culture of harmony. This outcome reflects the broader impact of interfaith interaction beyond individual transformation.

The results of this stage indicate that empathy and mutual respect serve as essential foundations for inclusive social behavior. By fostering these values, interfaith interaction enables students to move beyond tolerance as passive acceptance toward active engagement with diversity. This progression provides a basis for further development of communication skills and inclusive interaction patterns, which are discussed in the following section.

### 3. Development of Communication Skills and Openness in Interfaith Contexts

The findings of this study further reveal that interfaith interaction significantly enhances students' communication skills and openness in engaging with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. As students move beyond initial prejudice and develop empathy, they become more confident and capable in expressing their ideas, listening to others, and participating in constructive dialogue.

Through participation in interfaith activities, students are exposed to situations that require them to communicate across differences. These interactions encourage students to develop respectful communication strategies, including active listening, clear expression of ideas, and sensitivity to differing perspectives. The findings indicate that students become more aware of the importance of language, tone, and attitude in maintaining positive interaction.

In addition, the study shows that students develop a greater openness in dialogue. They become more willing to share their views while also being receptive to alternative perspectives. This openness reflects a shift from defensive or exclusive attitudes toward a more inclusive and dialogical orientation. Students learn that differences in belief do not necessarily lead to conflict but can serve as opportunities for meaningful exchange and mutual understanding.

The development of communication skills is also closely related to students' confidence in social interaction. Students who initially felt uncertain or hesitant when interacting with individuals from different religious backgrounds became more comfortable and proactive over time. This increased confidence enables them to participate more actively in discussions and to engage in collaborative activities.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that interfaith interaction fosters dialogical competence, which refers to the ability to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue. Students learn to manage disagreements, respond thoughtfully to differing opinions, and maintain a balanced approach in communication. This competence is essential in pluralistic societies, where effective communication plays a key role in preventing misunderstanding and conflict.

The study also indicates that communication skills and openness are reinforced through repeated practice. Students who participate in multiple interfaith activities demonstrate more refined communication abilities and greater openness compared to those with limited exposure. This suggests that continuous engagement is necessary to develop and sustain these competencies.

Moreover, the development of communication skills contributes to the creation of a more inclusive social environment within and beyond the boarding school. Students who are able to communicate effectively across differences are more likely to build positive relationships and to contribute to social harmony.

Overall, the findings of this stage demonstrate that interfaith interaction serves as an effective platform for developing communication skills and openness among students. These competencies are essential for fostering inclusive attitudes and preparing students to engage constructively in diverse social contexts. This development provides a foundation for the emergence of socially responsible behavior, which is discussed in the following stage.

#### 4. Development of Social Responsibility and Behavioral Transformation

The final findings of this study demonstrate that interfaith interaction contributes significantly to the development of social responsibility and long-term behavioral transformation among students. As students progress through stages of reduced prejudice, increased empathy, and improved communication, these changes culminate in observable shifts in behavior that reflect a deeper internalization of moderation values.

The results indicate that students become more socially responsible in their interactions with others. They demonstrate a greater willingness to participate in community activities, engage in cooperative initiatives, and contribute to maintaining social harmony. This sense of responsibility reflects an awareness of

their role as members of a diverse society, where mutual respect and collaboration are essential.

Furthermore, students exhibit a stronger commitment to peaceful coexistence. They show a tendency to avoid conflict, resolve disagreements constructively, and promote understanding among peers. This behavioral shift suggests that interfaith interaction not only influences attitudes but also shapes how students respond to real-life social situations.

The findings also reveal that students develop a proactive orientation toward social engagement. Rather than remaining passive observers, students become active participants in promoting inclusive values within their communities. They initiate conversations, encourage respectful interaction, and serve as mediators in situations of misunderstanding. This proactive behavior indicates a higher level of internalization, where moderation values are not only practiced but also promoted.

In addition, the study highlights that repeated and sustained interfaith interaction strengthens the consistency of these behaviors. Students who are continuously involved in interfaith activities demonstrate more stable and enduring patterns of socially responsible behavior compared to those with limited exposure. This finding underscores the importance of continuity in ensuring long-term impact.

The transformation observed among students also contributes to the formation of a positive social environment within the boarding school and its surrounding community. As students adopt inclusive and cooperative behaviors, these values become part of the shared culture, influencing others and reinforcing a cycle of positive interaction. This collective dimension enhances the sustainability of social harmony.

Moreover, the findings indicate that behavioral transformation is closely linked to experiential learning. Students who directly experience interaction with diverse communities are more likely to internalize values deeply compared to those who rely solely on theoretical instruction. This reinforces the importance of practice-based approaches in education, where learning is grounded in real-life experience.

Overall, the findings of this stage demonstrate that interfaith interaction leads to meaningful and sustainable behavioral change. The development of social responsibility represents the culmination of the internalization process, where students not only understand and accept moderation values but also embody them in their actions. This transformation provides strong evidence that interfaith interaction is an effective approach to promoting social harmony and religious moderation in Islamic boarding schools.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that interfaith interaction serves as a powerful mechanism for promoting social harmony and strengthening religious moderation among students in Islamic boarding schools. Rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction, interfaith interaction enables students to experience diversity directly, thereby facilitating a deeper and more meaningful

process of value internalization. This experiential dimension distinguishes interfaith engagement as a practical and effective educational strategy.

At the initial stage, the reduction of prejudice observed in this study highlights the importance of direct contact in transforming students' perceptions. Prior to engagement, students' attitudes were often shaped by limited exposure and indirect information, leading to stereotypes and social distance. However, through sustained interaction with individuals from different religious backgrounds, these perceptions were gradually replaced by more informed and balanced views. This finding strongly supports intergroup contact theory, which posits that meaningful interaction between groups reduces prejudice and improves intergroup relations (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Importantly, the effectiveness of interfaith interaction in reducing prejudice is not merely a function of contact itself, but of the quality of that contact. Interactions characterized by cooperation, equal participation, and mutual respect are more likely to produce positive outcomes. This suggests that structured and well-designed interfaith programs are essential for achieving meaningful transformation, as unstructured or superficial contact may not yield the same impact.

Beyond the reduction of prejudice, the findings indicate that interfaith interaction contributes to the development of empathy and mutual respect. This progression reflects a shift from cognitive change to affective engagement, where students begin to understand and appreciate the perspectives of others. The development of empathy plays a critical role in fostering inclusive attitudes, as it enables individuals to move beyond tolerance as passive acceptance toward active engagement with diversity.

The relational dimension of interfaith interaction is particularly significant in this context. Through dialogue and shared experiences, students build connections that foster trust and mutual understanding. These relationships serve as a foundation for more inclusive social behavior, reinforcing the idea that social harmony is built through interaction rather than isolation.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of communication as a mediating factor in the process of value internalization. As students develop openness and dialogical competence, they become more capable of engaging in constructive interaction across differences. This ability to communicate effectively not only reduces misunderstanding but also promotes cooperation and collaboration in diverse social settings.

The progression from prejudice reduction to empathy and communication reflects a structured process of transformation that is facilitated by interfaith interaction. Each stage builds upon the previous one, creating a cumulative effect that strengthens students' capacity to engage with diversity in a constructive manner. This process demonstrates that interfaith interaction is not a one-time activity but a continuous and evolving experience that shapes students' attitudes and behavior over time.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that interfaith interaction provides a comprehensive framework for promoting social harmony in educational settings.

By integrating cognitive, emotional, and communicative dimensions, this approach enables students to develop inclusive attitudes and to navigate diversity effectively. This integrated process forms the basis for further analysis of the broader impacts of interfaith interaction, particularly in relation to behavioral transformation and social responsibility, which are discussed in the following section.

Building upon the progression from prejudice reduction to empathy and improved communication, the findings further demonstrate that interfaith interaction leads to the development of social responsibility and meaningful behavioral transformation among students. This stage represents the culmination of the internalization process, where moderation values are not only understood and appreciated but also consistently reflected in students' actions and social engagement.

The emergence of social responsibility among students indicates that interfaith interaction has a transformative impact that extends beyond individual attitudes. Students begin to recognize their role within a broader social context and demonstrate a willingness to contribute to the maintenance of social harmony. This finding aligns with the concept of social capital, which emphasizes the importance of trust, cooperation, and shared norms in facilitating collective action within diverse societies (Putnam, 2007). Through interfaith interaction, students develop bridging social capital that connects them with individuals from different religious backgrounds, thereby strengthening social cohesion.

Furthermore, the development of socially responsible behavior reflects a shift from passive acceptance of diversity toward active engagement. Students become more proactive in promoting inclusive values, participating in community activities, and supporting cooperative initiatives. This proactive orientation suggests that interfaith interaction not only influences attitudes but also empowers students to act as agents of social harmony within their communities.

The findings also highlight the role of the pesantren environment in reinforcing this transformation. As a residential educational setting, pesantren provides continuous opportunities for interaction, reflection, and practice. The integration of community engagement within this environment ensures that students are consistently exposed to situations that require them to apply moderation values in real-life contexts. This sustained exposure strengthens the internalization process and contributes to long-term behavioral change.

In addition, the communal nature of pesantren supports the collective reinforcement of values. When students practice inclusive and cooperative behavior, these actions influence their peers and contribute to the formation of a shared culture of tolerance and mutual respect. This collective dimension enhances the sustainability of social harmony, as values are reinforced not only by teachers but also by the student community itself.

The findings also demonstrate that interfaith interaction enhances students' ability to manage social differences constructively. Students develop skills in conflict resolution, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving, which are essential for maintaining stability in diverse societies. These competencies reflect

the practical outcomes of religious moderation, where individuals are able to engage with differences in a balanced and constructive manner.

Moreover, the integration of experiential learning within interfaith interaction plays a crucial role in shaping behavior. Students who actively participate in real-life social engagement are more likely to internalize values deeply compared to those who rely solely on theoretical knowledge. This supports the perspective that meaningful learning occurs through experience, reflection, and application.

Overall, the findings of this stage demonstrate that interfaith interaction contributes significantly to both individual transformation and collective social development. By fostering social responsibility, strengthening social capital, and enhancing cooperative behavior, interfaith interaction provides a sustainable approach to promoting social harmony. These insights form the basis for further analysis of the broader theoretical contributions and practical implications of this study, which are discussed in the following section.

Extending from the previous analysis, the findings of this study culminate in the development of an integrative model of interfaith interaction for promoting social harmony in Islamic boarding schools. This model emphasizes that effective interfaith engagement is not a single event but a continuous and structured process that integrates cognitive, affective, communicative, and behavioral dimensions within a unified educational framework.

The integrative model identified in this study consists of four interconnected stages: reduction of prejudice, development of empathy, enhancement of communication skills, and formation of socially responsible behavior. Each stage represents a progressive transformation in students' attitudes and actions, where initial cognitive shifts are reinforced by emotional engagement and translated into practical behavior. The effectiveness of this model lies in the synergy between these stages, which together create a comprehensive process of value internalization.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the integration of intergroup contact theory, pluralism, and social capital into a cohesive framework within the context of Islamic education. While intergroup contact theory explains how interaction reduces prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), pluralism emphasizes active engagement with diversity (Berger, 2014), and social capital highlights the role of trust and cooperation in social cohesion (Putnam, 2007). This study demonstrates that these theoretical perspectives can be combined to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how interfaith interaction promotes social harmony.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on interfaith interaction as a community service-based educational strategy that operates at the micro-level of social interaction. Unlike previous studies that emphasize institutional or curriculum-based approaches, this study highlights direct engagement between students and diverse communities as the primary mechanism for transforming attitudes and behavior. This micro-level perspective provides a more practice-oriented and sustainable approach to promoting religious moderation and social harmony.

Furthermore, the model underscores the importance of sustainability in interfaith interaction programs. Continuous and repeated engagement is essential for reinforcing positive attitudes and ensuring long-term behavioral change. Short-term or isolated activities may produce temporary effects, but sustained interaction creates deeper and more enduring transformation.

The practical implications of this study are highly relevant for educators and policymakers. Educational institutions are encouraged to design and implement structured interfaith interaction programs that emphasize dialogue, collaboration, and shared experiences. Such programs should be integrated into the broader educational framework to ensure consistency and sustainability.

In addition, teacher involvement is crucial in facilitating effective interfaith interaction. Teachers play a key role in guiding students, ensuring respectful engagement, and providing reflection opportunities that enhance learning outcomes. Institutional support, including training and resource provision, is also necessary to maximize the effectiveness of these programs.

Moreover, the adaptability of the proposed model allows it to be applied in various educational contexts beyond Islamic boarding schools. By focusing on fundamental processes of interaction and learning, the model provides a flexible framework that can be tailored to different cultural and social environments. This adaptability enhances the broader relevance of the study.

Overall, this study contributes to both theoretical and practical advancements by providing a comprehensive and integrated framework for promoting social harmony through interfaith interaction. The findings highlight that meaningful and sustained engagement is essential for fostering inclusive attitudes, reducing prejudice, and developing socially responsible individuals. This integrative approach offers a valuable strategy for addressing the challenges of diversity in contemporary societies.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that interfaith interaction serves as an effective and transformative approach in promoting social harmony and strengthening religious moderation among students in Islamic boarding schools. By engaging students in direct and meaningful interaction with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, the study reveals a structured process of internalization that encompasses cognitive, affective, communicative, and behavioral dimensions.

At the initial stage, interfaith interaction contributes to the reduction of prejudice by providing students with direct exposure to diversity. This exposure allows students to reassess preconceived assumptions and develop more informed and balanced perspectives. The transformation observed at this stage highlights the importance of moving beyond indirect knowledge toward experiential engagement as a foundation for inclusive attitudes.

Furthermore, the study finds that interfaith interaction fosters the development of empathy and mutual respect. Through dialogue and shared experiences, students become more sensitive to the perspectives and experiences of others. This

emotional engagement strengthens their ability to appreciate differences and to build positive relationships across religious boundaries. Empathy and respect emerge as essential components in the formation of harmonious social interaction.

The development of communication skills and openness represents another significant outcome of interfaith interaction. Students become more confident in expressing their ideas, engaging in dialogue, and responding constructively to differing perspectives. These competencies enable students to navigate diversity more effectively and to contribute to constructive social interaction.

At the behavioral level, the study reveals that interfaith interaction leads to the development of social responsibility and proactive engagement. Students demonstrate increased participation in community activities, a commitment to peaceful coexistence, and a willingness to promote inclusive values within their social environment. This behavioral transformation reflects the successful internalization of moderation values and highlights the practical impact of interfaith interaction.

This study also proposes an integrative model of interfaith interaction consisting of four interconnected stages: reduction of prejudice, development of empathy, enhancement of communication skills, and formation of socially responsible behavior. This model emphasizes that effective value internalization requires a continuous and structured process supported by sustained interaction and experiential learning.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the integration of intergroup contact theory, pluralism, and social capital within the context of Islamic education. From a practical perspective, it highlights the importance of designing structured interfaith interaction programs that emphasize dialogue, collaboration, and real-world engagement.

In conclusion, interfaith interaction represents a powerful and sustainable strategy for promoting social harmony in pluralistic societies. By facilitating meaningful engagement with diversity, it enables students to develop inclusive attitudes, effective communication skills, and socially responsible behavior. Educational institutions should therefore prioritize the integration of interfaith interaction into their programs to prepare students to become active contributors to peaceful and inclusive communities.

Future research is encouraged to explore the long-term impact of interfaith interaction across different educational contexts and to examine how such approaches can be adapted to address emerging challenges in increasingly diverse societies.

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