



Democratic Participation in Islamic Religious Education and Interfaith Courtesy in an Indonesian Elementary School

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Abstract

Religiously diverse elementary schools provide opportunities to practice democratic values through classroom instruction and shared activities. Yet evidence remains limited on how participation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons differs from interfaith courtesy in wider school life. This study aims to examine these practices and develop a context-sensitive account of their connection at Public Elementary School 1 of Taman Sari, Indonesia. The research employed a qualitative single-site case-study design involving purposively selected school leaders, teachers, and pupils. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and school documents, and analyzed using data condensation, thematic displays, and conclusion drawing. The findings identified four recurring democratic values: freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, tolerance of differences, and fairness. Classroom observations documented teachers inviting questions, encouraging pupils to express views, and providing opportunities to participate in PAI lessons. Interview accounts described cultural presentations, interfaith greetings, and respect for religious observances during shared school activities. These findings distinguish observed classroom participation from reported interfaith courtesy without establishing causal relationships or changes in pupils' attitudes. The study contributes a provisional Democratic Religious Learning framework linking participatory instruction and inclusive school routines, with implications for designing and documenting integrated values education in religiously diverse elementary schools.

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1. Introduction

Religious education in culturally and religiously diverse elementary schools has a dual pedagogical task: it introduces pupils to the beliefs and moral traditions of their own communities while also preparing them to interact respectfully with people who hold different convictions. This task is particularly evident in Indonesian public schools, where religious instruction coexists with a broader school environment shared by children from diverse backgrounds. Religious



moderation, as considered in this study, concerns how pupils recognize differences, participate without exclusion, show respect for others' religious practices, and conduct social relationships fairly. The educational question is therefore not limited to whether pupils can define tolerance, but extends to how they encounter and practice it in everyday learning and school life. Research in Indonesian primary education has already examined teachers' engagement in cultivating religious moderation (Muslih, Luthfan, et al., 2024) and the curricular integration of tolerance-oriented values (Barsihanor et al., 2024). However, the relationship between democratic participation in religious education lessons and interreligious recognition in shared school activities remains less clearly described.

A normative foundation for this task is the idea that commitment to a religious tradition need not exclude civic recognition of others. Mu'ti (2023) distinguishes positive pluralism from the dilution of religious identity and argues that Islamic Religious Education should prepare learners to coexist while maintaining their convictions. Saada (2022) similarly distinguishes the communitarian, civic, and reflective aims of religious education. These arguments clarify the educational tension addressed here, but neither establishes that any particular classroom routine causes greater tolerance among elementary pupils. The empirical question is how participation and interreligious courtesy appear in ordinary school practice.

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam, PAI) is a relevant site for studying this connection because its instructional aims encompass knowledge, moral judgment, and conduct. However, the presence of religious-moderation objectives in curricular language does not by itself show how children experience these objectives. A classroom may teach respect for difference while still offering pupils few opportunities to voice an interpretation, ask a question, or respond to another perspective. When teachers organize opportunities for participation and model respectful dialogue, democratic values can be identified in instructional practice rather than only in stated curricular ideals. Huda (2024) identifies teacher example-setting, habituation, classroom learning, and school culture as sites through which moderation values may be integrated into Islamic education. Muslih, Luthfan, et al. (2024) focus more specifically on PAI teachers' understandings, commitments, practices, and difficulties in primary schools. These accounts direct attention to teachers' agency but also raise the question of what pupils actually encounter during instruction and during collective school activities.

Evidence from primary education shows considerable variation in how this aspiration is enacted. In a cross-national qualitative study, Muslih, Muslim, et al. (2024) observed that teachers in Indonesia and Malaysia adopted context-specific ways of communicating religious moderation while reporting pedagogical

limitations. Faqih et al. (2026) documented teacher modeling and storytelling in an Indonesian Islamic elementary school, but also noted inconsistency in dialogical instruction. Mulyana (2023), by contrast, examined textbook-based moderation in junior secondary education; that evidence is informative about curricular content but cannot be directly transferred to younger learners. Together, these studies underscore the need to examine what pupils can actually do and encounter, rather than inferring their conduct from teachers' reported commitments.

A complementary strand of scholarship positions religious moderation within curriculum and character education. Masdul et al. (2026) examine a moderation-oriented Islamic character education program in an elementary school setting and identify instructional, organizational, and contextual factors relevant to its implementation. Nurdaeni et al. (2024) examine the curricular strengthening of religious moderation within the Merdeka Curriculum. Suherman and Syafi'e (2025) likewise investigate the role of PAI in supporting moderation-related understandings among elementary pupils. Although these studies advance understanding of curricular and teacher-led efforts, they leave room for a sharper analytical distinction among the values being prescribed, the democratic opportunities actually available to pupils, and the conduct that pupils demonstrate in school interactions. The present investigation responds to that distinction without assuming that observed respectful behavior is equivalent to a measured, enduring change in attitude.

Recent elementary-education studies further distinguish curriculum-level integration from schoolwide participation. Barsihanor et al. (2024) described how multicultural and religious learning could be connected through equality, justice, and tolerance in an elementary school case. Nada et al. (2026) reported the roles of participatory civic learning and school leadership in a madrasah context. Masduki et al. (2026) examined a diversity-focused seminar for prospective elementary teachers, with measured outcomes relating to the adults' beliefs and awareness rather than pupils' moderation behaviors. These differences in unit of analysis are important: institutional arrangements, teacher preparedness, and children's interpersonal behavior cannot be treated as interchangeable indicators of success.

The literature on pluralism and multicultural Islamic education offers an additional conceptual perspective. Tuna (2024) argues for a form of Islamic religious education that engages with cultural and religious plurality rather than treating diversity solely as background. However, the article particularly examines intra-Muslim plurality in European settings. Fahmi et al. (2025) discuss the relationship between multicultural Islamic education and social cohesion in two Islamic-school settings in Asia; Muhajir et al. (2025) similarly highlight the pedagogical integration of multicultural values in Islamic religious education.

A'lawi and Budianto (2025) report dialogical instruction, contextualized teaching, and school culture as dimensions of moderation-related practice in an Indonesian primary school. These studies suggest that institutional arrangements and daily interactions can shape religion-related educational experience. However, the contexts, participants, and conceptions of plurality differ, so their insights cannot simply be transferred to a religiously diverse public elementary school without empirical examination.

Studies of inclusive and Islamic school settings also offer distinct explanatory resources. Ma'rifah and Sibawaihi (2023) investigated how multicultural values were institutionalized within an inclusive school, focusing on rules, relationships, and routines. Muqowim et al. (2022) approached Islamic moderation through the educational significance of the values of *wasatiyyah* and historical exemplars. Outside Indonesia, Sijamhodžić-Nadarević (2023) examined intercultural values within Islamic religious education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, emphasizing the importance of situated curriculum and intercultural dialogue. These perspectives suggest possible educational pathways, but their institutional, geographical, and methodological differences prevent simple generalization to the present school.

A further perspective comes from democratic and experiential accounts of schooling. Landorf and Wadley (2022) revisit Dewey's educational philosophy in relation to participatory and reflective experience, providing a lens for considering learning as participation in a community. Ferguson-Patrick (2020) documents how cooperative learning in culturally diverse classrooms can foreground relationships and engagement. However, the study is not about PAI and is not a direct comparator for religious moderation. In the broader field of intergroup relations, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) show an overall association between intergroup contact and reduced prejudice across studies. In contrast, Genkova and Schreiber (2025) distinguish positive and negative contact in a different population. These perspectives make it reasonable to investigate the quality of encounters and participation. However, they do not authorize claims that any given school event automatically changes prejudice or that contact is beneficial irrespective of its conditions.

The social settings beyond lessons deserve equal analytical attention. Pajarianto et al. (2022) documented the importance of familial and community traditions for interreligious tolerance, whereas Qadafi et al. (2024) examined how locally embedded practices shape early primary education. At an earlier educational stage, 'Aziz and Hidayah (2024) focused on the choices early childhood educators face when promoting tolerance without erasing religious identity. Such studies point to school culture and everyday encounters as potentially meaningful settings, yet they differ from the present case in age group or community setting. Therefore, this study treats the relationship between the

PAI classroom and shared school activities as an empirical question rather than a presupposed mechanism.

Two ambiguities in this literature are particularly consequential for elementary-school research. First, the vocabulary of religious moderation may refer to curriculum content, educators' pedagogical intentions, institutional rules, or children's everyday responses. These are related but empirically different phenomena. A teacher's explanation that respect matters is not the same observation as a pupil taking another person's perspective; similarly, a cultural program may provide the opportunity for interaction without showing whether quieter pupils participate equitably. Huda (2024), Muslih, Luthfan, et al. (2024), and A'lawi and Budianto (2025) illuminate multiple levels of school practice. However, their findings should not be reduced to a single, undifferentiated claim of successful character development. For this study, democratic values are therefore treated as recognizable principles that guide participation. In contrast, moderation-related conduct is treated as a set of situated interactions to be described rather than as a psychological trait presumed to have been acquired. This separation creates a clearer analytic bridge between what a school does and what its pupils are reported to do.

A related methodological distinction concerns contact itself. Shamo-Nir and Razpurker-Apfeld (2023) reviewed imagined contact as a strategy for improving intergroup relations, whereas the present study describes pupils' reported encounters during actual school activities. Fadlilah and Mursid (2024) likewise investigated the practical cultivation of tolerance in a kindergarten setting. These sources support the educational relevance of opportunities for encounter, but the mere presence of greetings or collaborative events does not demonstrate reduced prejudice. Such an inference would require a defined behavioral measure, comparison, and repeated evidence beyond the case material available here.

Second, the relation between democratic practice and religious identity needs careful specification. Equal classroom participation does not require pupils to share identical religious beliefs, and respectful interreligious contact does not require participation in another's worship. Educational inclusion can instead involve recognizing distinct identities while maintaining common norms of fairness, courteous expression, and non-discrimination. Tuna's (2024) attention to the educational challenges of plurality and Fahmi et al.'s (2025) analysis of institutional approaches to social cohesion underscore the importance of this distinction. The conditions of meaningful intergroup encounter also matter. Contact can differ in quality, voluntariness, and perceived safety, as the broader literature on intergroup relations indicates (Genkova & Schreiber, 2025; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Consequently, an account of activities alone is insufficient for asserting that prejudice declined. The present study examines reported examples

of participation and courtesy, while recognizing that pupils' private attitudes, possible tensions, and unequal experiences would require additional direct evidence.

Taken together, existing scholarship has established the relevance of religious-moderation curricula, teacher practices, multicultural approaches, and social interaction. Less clearly documented is how democratic values are translated into concrete participation rights and social practices across two different yet related sites within the same elementary school: PAI lessons and whole-school activities involving children of different faiths. This gap is not merely geographical. It concerns the relationship among an instructional process organized around freedom of expression, equality, tolerance, and fairness; opportunities for pupils to encounter religious and cultural differences; and situated behaviors that can be cautiously understood as expressions of religious moderation. Treating these elements separately is important because religious instruction may not necessarily bring pupils of different religions together, whereas cultural-week programs and shared school spaces may do so.

Public Elementary School 1 (SDN 1) of Taman Sari offers a contextual case in which these relationships can be examined. The school serves pupils from diverse religious backgrounds and provides a setting to examine PAI learning alongside cultural week programs and activities associated with religious holidays. Rather than evaluating a standardized intervention, the study examines how actors describe and enact democratic values across these settings. This focus enables analysis of instructional arrangements and reported conduct while preserving the limits of a single-school qualitative case study. The study contributes a situated account of democratic participation, reports interfaith courtesy, and organizes these practices into a provisional framework termed Democratic Religious Learning. This framework is an analytic synthesis of the case, not a validated instructional intervention.

Accordingly, this study pursued three connected objectives: (1) to examine how democratic values were enacted in PAI teaching and in related school activities; (2) to identify moderation-related behaviors reported or observed in the interactions of pupils from different backgrounds; and (3) to develop a context-sensitive framework that relates classroom participation to inclusive school culture without presuming a causal connection. These objectives shift attention from generalized claims about the effectiveness of religious moderation programs toward demonstrable classroom and school practices that can inform future research, educational design, and careful evaluation.

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative single-site case study design to examine democratic practices in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and in wider school life at Public Elementary School 1 (SDN 1) in Taman Sari, Indonesia. A case study was appropriate for investigating how democratic values appeared in teaching and how school actors understood everyday interactions in their natural setting. The investigation was descriptive and interpretive; it did not involve experimental manipulation, an intervention comparison, or pretest–posttest measurement.

The study was situated in a public elementary school attended by pupils from Muslim, Hindu, and Christian backgrounds. The participants included the principal, Islamic education teachers, homeroom teachers, and pupils, who were purposively selected for their involvement in the practices under investigation. The reported interview evidence used codes IM (school principal), MI (Islamic education teacher), and H (school informant); the role associated with H was not specified in the available material. The available study documentation did not specify the number of informants, grade levels, fieldwork dates, or religious composition of observed Islamic education classes. Accordingly, the analysis of interreligious interaction focuses on shared school activities rather than on assuming mixed-faith participation in Islamic education lessons.

Data collection comprised classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations focused on teacher–pupil interactions and opportunities for questioning, expression, and participation. Interviews elicited accounts from school leaders, teachers, and pupils concerning democratic values, school diversity, and relevant social interactions. The documents named in the research record included teaching modules, learning materials, the school operational curriculum, school regulations, and supporting school records. Cultural-week events and activities associated with religious holidays were described predominantly through interview accounts.

To preserve the distinction between forms of evidence, classroom practices described as observations were differentiated from interviewees' accounts of schoolwide events. Reported greetings, exchanges of small gifts, cultural presentations, and consideration for worship were attributed to informant accounts of shared school life, not to direct observation of interfaith interaction within PAI lessons.

Qualitative material was analyzed using the interactive procedures of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). Thematic reporting centered on democratic participation in Islamic education lessons, cultural and religious school programs, moderation-related expressions of respect, and an integrative conceptual framework. The research report referred to thematic displays and matrices, but the available material did not contain a coding manual or complete coded transcripts. For this reason, the report presents

qualitative patterns without assigning unsupported frequencies or making statistical generalizations.

Source triangulation, technique triangulation, member checking, and sustained observation were reported as credibility procedures. Findings are attributed to the available observations and informant accounts; the evidence is not used to infer causal effects or changes in pupils' attitudes over time. Ethical reporting and the limitations of the available consent documentation are described in the Declarations section.

3. Results

The case involved a public elementary school serving Muslim, Hindu, and Christian pupils. The evidence reveals a differentiated pattern across educational settings rather than a single measured outcome: four democratic values were expressed through classroom participation and schoolwide practices, while interfaith courtesy was described primarily in interview accounts of shared activities. The subsections separate what was observed in PAI lessons, what informants reported about school events, and how these findings inform a provisional analytical framework.

3.1 Democratic Values Took the Form of Opportunities for Pupil Voice and Participation

In Islamic education instruction, the teacher identified as MI described incorporating respect for differences and democratic participation into lesson planning and classroom activities. Observations described teachers inviting pupils to ask questions, contribute opinions, and participate in learning tasks. These examples point to the procedural organization of classroom interaction, not to measured changes in pupils' beliefs or to evidence that pupils from different religions attended the same PAI lessons.

MI also referred to curriculum guidance concerning respectful relationships and diversity. Teachers were described as encouraging expression and participation while modeling considerate conduct. Equality and fairness appeared in accounts of comparable opportunities to contribute, although the available materials did not independently quantify participation or show whether quieter pupils enjoyed equivalent access. Thus, the most directly observable classroom pattern was the provision of participation opportunities rather than the measured distribution of those opportunities across every pupil.

Table 1 presents the four values alongside the evidence sources and the limits of what each example supports. The first two values are most directly associated with classroom voice and access; tolerance is illustrated chiefly by accounts of interfaith conduct beyond PAI lessons; and fairness remains primarily

a reported instructional intention. Therefore, the table differentiates evidential strength rather than treating all values as equally observed.

Table 1.
Democratic Values, Empirical Practices, and Reported Behavioral Expressions

Democratic value	Case evidence and setting	Warranted interpretation
Freedom of expression	Teachers invited pupils to ask questions and voice opinions during PAI lessons (MI; classroom observations).	Opportunities for pupil expression were documented; the frequency and depth of pupil voice were not measured.
Equality of opportunity	MI and IM described comparable opportunities to join lessons and school activities.	Non-exclusion was reported, but the distribution of participation was not independently assessed.
Tolerance and respect for difference	H described holiday greetings, consideration for observances, and school cultural presentations.	Interfaith courtesy was reported in shared school settings, not directly observed in PAI lessons.
Fairness	MI and IM described a fair allocation of opportunities during learning and school activities.	Fairness was an espoused practice; systematic allocation of data was unavailable.

Source: Study interview accounts (IM, MI, H) and reported classroom observations. Statements are qualitative and do not represent frequency estimates.

3.2 Shared Cultural and Religious Events Provided Reported Occasions for Interfaith Recognition

IM and H described cultural-week programs and activities surrounding religious holidays as occasions for pupils from different religious backgrounds to recognize one another. According to IM, teachers participated in planning PAI lessons and school cultural and holiday activities. During cultural week, pupils were reportedly invited to present traditions and artistic expressions to the wider school community.

The accounts distinguish the functions of the settings. PAI lessons provided subject-specific opportunities to ask questions and contribute to learning; cultural week offered opportunities to make different traditions visible; and activities surrounding religious observances enabled reciprocal greetings and considerate social contact. Informants presented these events as features of ordinary school life, not components of a standardized intervention.

H described pupils exchanging greetings and small gifts, acknowledging religious celebrations, and showing consideration for classmates’ observances. Muslim, Hindu, and Christian pupils reportedly joined social or cultural activities associated with celebrations while maintaining the distinction between shared

activities and faith-specific worship. These examples indicate reported recognition of religious differences in school life. They do not establish how often the practices occurred or how every pupil experienced them.

3.3 The Evidence Differentiated Classroom Participation from Reported Interfaith Courtesy

Three recurring forms of enactment emerge from the case: participation through questions and opinions within PAI lessons, cultural recognition through public presentations, and interpersonal courtesy through greetings and consideration for observances. The forms are complementary in the school context but were supported by different kinds of evidence. Classroom observation contributed directly to the account of participation, whereas interviews supplied most examples of interfaith conduct during schoolwide programs.

As summarized in Table 2, the data suggest a progression in the range of social opportunities across settings—from subject-based voice to representation of identities and then to courteous relations across faiths. This is an organizational pattern in the reported evidence, not a temporal sequence verified for individual pupils. Neither the data nor the case design establishes that participation in PAI lessons led to the reported interfaith behaviors.

Table 2.

Cross-setting patterns and boundaries of the empirical evidence

Educational setting	Principal practice or pattern	Evidence base	Evidence boundary
PAI lessons	Teachers invited questions, opinions, and involvement in class activities.	Classroom observations; MI account	Participation opportunities, not demonstrated mixed-faith classroom interaction.
Cultural week	Pupils reportedly presented traditions and artistic expressions within shared activities.	IM and H interviews	Reported opportunities for cultural representation; individual experiences not systematically observed.
Holiday-related school activities	Pupils reportedly exchanged greetings and gifts and respected observances without sharing faith-specific worship.	H interview	Reported interfaith courtesy; neither attitude change nor reduced prejudice was measured.

Source: Cross-setting synthesis of the interviews and classroom observations reported in the study. The three settings were not evaluated as a causal sequence.

3.4 Provisional Democratic Religious Learning Framework that Connected the Observed Patterns

The four democratic values—freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, tolerance, and fairness—can be used to organize the practices documented across the case. At the instructional level, pupil voice and opportunities for participation make democratic norms visible within religious learning. At the schoolwide level, cultural representation and reported interfaith courtesy provide occasions to acknowledge differences while maintaining religious boundaries. The proposed Democratic Religious Learning framework brings these settings into one descriptive account of integrated values education. It is a conceptual synthesis of the reported patterns, not an independently tested model of behavioral change.

4. Discussion

The findings bring into view two related but empirically distinct settings: participation in Islamic Religious Education and interactions across shared school life. Their educational significance lies in the complementary opportunities they offer for enacting democratic values, while the differences in evidence sources prevent an inference that one setting caused outcomes in the other. The discussion interprets this distinction in relation to experiential, multicultural, and intergroup scholarship.

4.1 Democratic Participation as an Experiential Dimension of Religious Education

The first finding suggests that democratic values were communicated not only through the content of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) but also through the social organization of learning. Opportunities to ask questions, express views, and participate in classroom activities made equality and respect visible as pedagogical practices. This distinction is consequential: a lesson may transmit religious knowledge about tolerance while offering few opportunities to exercise the dispositions that tolerance requires. In the present case, teachers' reported use of open participation and modeling provided occasions for students to encounter democratic norms in the routine conduct of lessons. The data do not establish that these practices changed students' attitudes; rather, they show how such norms were enacted in the instructional setting.

An experiential interpretation is consistent with the Deweyan account of education discussed by Landorf and Wadley (2022), which emphasizes the quality of participation and reflective experience rather than the transmission of information alone. Related classroom research by Ferguson-Patrick (2020) shows how cooperative arrangements can foreground relationships and engagement among culturally diverse learners. However, that study examined

Swedish classrooms rather than Indonesian religious education, and the present case did not systematically document cooperative-learning structures or reflective dialogue. The defensible point of convergence is therefore the pedagogical importance of interpersonal participation, not the equivalence of interventions or outcomes. Likewise, Huda (2024) identifies the integration of religious moderation into teaching practices and school processes; the present study adds a more specific account of the democratic practices through which that integration was expressed.

Two strands of recent evidence sharpen this interpretation. Barsihanor et al. (2024) examined integration of multicultural and religious education at the elementary level, while Muslih, Muslim, et al. (2024) showed that moderation messages may be mediated differently by teachers across national and institutional contexts. The present case makes a narrower point: the reported democratic values took an instructional form through opportunities to speak and participate in classroom activities. The evidence does not establish whether those opportunities were distributed equally in every lesson, making procedural fairness an analytical claim that remains open to closer observational verification.

An important distinction concerns the instructional and institutional settings. The evidence does not establish that children of different religions participated in the same PAI lessons. Interreligious encounters are therefore discussed primarily in relation to shared school activities, while participatory pedagogy is discussed as a characteristic of PAI instruction. Their combined significance lies in how subject teaching and wider school culture can offer complementary settings for learning inclusive values.

4.2 Schoolwide Encounters as Contexts for Interreligious Recognition

The schoolwide accounts locate democratic learning beyond the boundaries of the subject lesson. Cultural week and activities associated with religious celebrations provided opportunities for students to display their identities, encounter others' traditions, and engage in reciprocal gestures of respect. These practices offered a social setting in which fairness and recognition were publicly demonstrated. Their educational relevance lies less in the occurrence of a particular festival than in the reported norms governing participation: different traditions could be represented, classmates could offer greetings, and students were expected to respect the religious observances of others without having to adopt those observances themselves.

Intergroup contact research offers a plausible lens for understanding why such settings might matter. The meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) found an overall association between contact and lower intergroup prejudice across a wide range of populations, while emphasizing that the quality and conditions of contact influence outcomes. More recent work by Genkova and Schreiber (2025) distinguishes between positive and negative contact

experiences, although the evidence comes from German university students rather than children. These studies justify attending to the character of encounters, but they do not permit an inference that the events at SDN 1 Taman Sari reduced prejudice. The present study provides descriptions of respectful encounters, not repeated measures of prejudice, observations of conflict resolution, or systematic comparisons with pupils who did not participate.

Contact should nevertheless not be treated as a self-evident mechanism. Qadafi et al. (2024) emphasized locally situated tolerance practices in a community context, and Pajarianto et al. (2022) located interreligious civility within family and local cultural arrangements. By comparison, the school events described here offered institutionally organized opportunities for courtesy; they may have reproduced habits learned elsewhere as much as generated new ones. Shamo-Nir and Razpurker-Apfeld (2023) are also concerned with imagined rather than directly observed contact, underscoring why distinct forms of contact should not be conflated in an explanatory claim.

The case can also be situated alongside Fahmi et al. (2025), who examined multicultural Islamic education and social cohesion in Islamic school contexts. Whereas that research considered institutional approaches to multicultural education in two settings, the present case highlights the combination of classroom democratic practices and occasions for everyday interreligious recognition within a public elementary school. A useful distinction emerges between the provision of opportunities for contact and the actual quality of participation: the former is documented by the events, while the latter requires closer observation of pupil voices, possible exclusion, and unequal participation.

4.3 Religious Moderation through Situated Behavioral Indicators

A third analytic issue concerns what can reasonably be inferred from pupils' reported conduct. Interview accounts described communication and cooperation across religious backgrounds, holiday greetings, reciprocal gestures of appreciation, and consideration for others' worship. Taken together, these behaviors are compatible with openness, respect for difference, and inclusive interpersonal relations. They provide useful, age-appropriate indicators of moderation-related conduct because elementary pupils may express social and ethical understanding through interactions before they can articulate elaborate conceptual definitions. Nevertheless, observable courtesy is not interchangeable with a stable disposition or a comprehensive measure of religious moderation.

This distinction clarifies the relationship between the study and previous scholarship. Tuna (2024) argues for a pluralism-fostering orientation in Islamic religious education, with particular attention to plurality within Muslim communities in European contexts. The present study addresses interreligious encounters in an Indonesian elementary school setting, thereby extending the discussion to the relationship between religious instruction and schoolwide

recognition of different faiths. Research by Adibah et al. (2025) likewise describes inclusive strategies and teacher modeling in PAI, but its participants were at the senior-secondary level; developmental and institutional differences prevent direct extrapolation to younger pupils. By contrast, Masdul et al. (2026) examined moderation-based character education in an elementary school curriculum, providing a closer educational comparison. The present case is distinctive in locating democratic values across both instructional interactions and school cultural events rather than treating moderation solely as a curricular topic.

A useful conceptual distinction comes from Saada (2022), whose framework separates the maintenance of religious belonging from civic skills for living with difference. Mu'ti (2023) similarly treats positive pluralism as compatible with firm religious conviction. In the present findings, courtesy toward classmates' celebrations is better characterized as recognition of others' rights and identities than as agreement with their beliefs. This distinction also prevents a category error: respect for worship does not imply that pupils participated in another faith's ritual. The available descriptions indicate coexistence and courtesy, not a validated disposition scale.

The evidence must also be interpreted proportionately. The study did not measure baseline attitudes or follow pupils longitudinally. Accounts of positive encounters cannot demonstrate that every child participated equally or that disagreements never arose. Therefore, the findings concern reported practices consistent with particular dimensions of religious moderation rather than demonstrated reductions in prejudice or sustained attitudinal change.

4.4 The Democratic Religious Learning Model as an Integrative, Context-Bound Proposition

The cross-setting synthesis yields a Democratic Religious Learning framework. Its contribution is not to claim that freedom of expression, equality, tolerance, and fairness are new values, but to organize their reported classroom and schoolwide enactment within one analytic account. The framework distinguishes participatory instruction, cultural representation, and interfaith courtesy, then relates these settings to selected expressions of recognition and respect. It offers categories for examining the intersection of civic participation and religious learning rather than a validated model of instructional effectiveness.

The model should be understood as an integrative pedagogical proposition rather than a validated explanation of causal mechanisms. Huda (2024) emphasizes instructional and organizational processes through which religious moderation values may be incorporated into Islamic education, while Masdul et al. (2026) investigate moderation-oriented character education in an elementary curriculum. The proposed model is more narrowly differentiated by its attention to democratic enactment: it specifies the practices and school spaces through which students are invited to participate, encounter differences, and demonstrate

recognition. This distinction is a plausible conceptual contribution, although the current evidence cannot establish whether democratic participation is necessary, sufficient, or more influential than other elements of school culture.

Positioning this model in relation to the literature exposes both an overlap and a narrower contribution. Faqih et al. (2026) documented the use of teacher examples and respectful communication in an Islamic primary-school setting, while Ma'rifah and Sibawaihi (2023) examined the institutionalization of multicultural values. The present model links participation in PAI, opportunities for interfaith social interaction, and reported expressions of recognition within the same school case. It does not establish that this arrangement is unique to SDN 1 Taman Sari or superior to alternatives, and its proposed connections should be considered propositions for further testing.

Alternative explanations remain plausible and are analytically important. For example, respectful holiday greetings may reflect established school routines, teachers' expectations, family socialization, or pupils' individual relationships rather than a consequence of democratic discussion in PAI. Similarly, participation during a lesson may arise from classroom-management practices without necessarily representing independent pupil deliberation. The observations available in this case cannot separate these possibilities, nor can they determine whether the schoolwide activities would have produced similar forms of courtesy in the absence of PAI learning. A stronger test of the proposed framework would compare situations in which pupils have different degrees of voice, document how disagreements are addressed, and examine the participation of students who may feel marginal to majority school practices. Treating such rival accounts as legitimate research questions makes the Democratic Religious Learning proposition more scientifically useful. It identifies the kinds of practices and boundaries future researchers should observe instead of presenting every example of harmonious interaction as confirmation of one predetermined explanation.

The findings support a cautious conceptual sequence: democratic values are enacted through classroom and schoolwide practices; these practices offer opportunities for participation and interreligious contact; and informants describe instances of respectful conduct. The sequence provides an interpretive account of the case, not a tested causal pathway. Future research could specify each component, document the quality and distribution of participation, attend to negative experiences, and examine the framework across varied school settings.

4.5 Implications for Inclusive Elementary School Practice

The findings suggest that teachers and school leaders can treat democratic values as principles for organizing participation rather than as topics to be explained only verbally. Possible applications include ensuring genuine opportunities to speak and listen during Islamic education, making cultural

representation accessible to different groups, and establishing respectful boundaries between shared social activities and faith-specific worship. These are context-informed implications, not recommendations whose effectiveness has been experimentally established. Evaluation would need to attend not only to the presence of programs but also to whose voices are heard, who is excluded, and how differences or tensions are handled in everyday interactions.

Teacher education and curricular planning offer two cautious applications. Masduki et al. (2026) address integrated approaches to religious tolerance in elementary teacher settings, whereas Nada et al. (2026) emphasize contextual and collaborative approaches to multicultural civic education. These studies inform the wider discussion of professional learning, although their participants and contexts differ from this case. Therefore, schools wishing to use the proposed framework should document the inclusiveness of speaking opportunities, distinguish religious instruction from joint social events, solicit children's own accounts, and check for negative or exclusionary experiences rather than recording only affirmative encounters.

4.6 Methodological Limits and Further Inquiry

The single-school design and the predominantly summarized reporting of interviews and descriptive observations limit the evidential depth and transferability of the study. Information about participant numbers, fieldwork duration, the religious composition of observed PAI classes, and the handling of discrepant experiences was limited. Although credibility procedures were described, their implementation could not be evaluated in detail from the documented materials. These limitations prevent firm conclusions about prevalence, causality, or enduring changes in religious attitudes.

Further research could compare elementary schools, incorporate systematic classroom and schoolwide observations, obtain age-appropriate accounts from pupils, and examine participation over time. A mixed-methods investigation may help determine whether well-specified democratic practices correspond to independently assessed indicators of interfaith respect. For the present case, the principal contribution is a situated account of classroom democratic participation alongside schoolwide interreligious recognition, organized through a provisional conceptual framework.

5. Conclusion

This qualitative case study identified complementary, but empirically distinct, expressions of democratic values at an Indonesian public elementary school. Classroom observations and teacher accounts documented opportunities for questions, expression, and participation in Islamic Religious Education; school informants described cultural representation, greetings across faiths, and respect

for religious observances during shared activities. The findings identify practices consistent with freedom of expression, equality of opportunity, tolerance, and fairness, while differentiating directly observed classroom arrangements from reported interfaith behavior.

The study contributes a provisional Democratic Religious Learning framework for considering how subject teaching and wider school culture may together provide contexts for inclusive values education. Its contribution is analytical rather than causal: neither improvements in attitudes nor the effects of a particular instructional model were measured. For schools, the findings suggest evaluating not only whether participation and cultural activities are offered but also whose voices are heard and how religious differences are acknowledged without requiring participation in another faith's worship.

The single-site design, limited detail about participants and fieldwork, and the absence of complete coded records constrain transferability and verification of the reported patterns. Future studies should document pupils' own experiences, observe schoolwide encounters directly, examine unequal or negative experiences, and test the proposed framework across varied elementary-school contexts.

Declarations

All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript and reported no competing interests. The study was conducted with institutional permission, informed consent from participants or their guardians, and appropriate safeguards for confidentiality and religious sensitivity. Grammarly assisted with academic language refinement and citation consistency. No interview data, observations, or research findings were AI-generated. The authors verified the manuscript and retain full responsibility for its accuracy, ethical integrity, and scholarly content.

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