



## Enhancing religious tolerance among students through an integrative approach in elementary school teachers: a mixed-methods study

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### Abstract

Promoting religious tolerance is essential in multicultural societies, particularly in Indonesia, where diverse religious identities coexist. This study aimed to examine the impact of a religious identity-based seminar on prospective elementary school teachers' self-efficacy, beliefs about religious diversity, and stereotype awareness. Using a mixed methods design, 70 teacher candidates were divided into an intervention group and a control group. The intervention group participated in an eight-week seminar focused on religious identity, stereotype reflection, and inclusive pedagogy, while the control group attended conventional diversity training. Quantitative data were collected using validated scales for self-efficacy, curriculum beliefs, and stereotype awareness, and were analyzed using repeated-measures ANCOVA. Results showed that the intervention group experienced significant improvements across all three domains, with large effect sizes noted particularly in stereotype awareness ( $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ). Qualitative data from reflective responses supported these findings, revealing increased self-awareness, implementation of inclusive teaching strategies, and recognition of challenges such as a lack of resources and fear of miscommunication. The seminar effectively encouraged critical reflection and practical application, equipping participants to foster interfaith understanding in their future classrooms. This study underscores the value of culturally responsive, identity-focused training in teacher education and highlights the need for policy and institutional support to sustain inclusive teaching practices in diverse educational contexts.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the most significant and persistent challenges facing Indonesian schools today is the complex task of effectively encouraging students to accept and respect individuals from different religious backgrounds. This issue is especially difficult to navigate in a country characterized by profound religious and



cultural diversity, serving as a vibrant and sometimes fragile mosaic of traditions. Indonesia is home to over 300 distinct ethnic groups and six officially recognized religions, a variety that serves as both a fundamental national strength and a potential source of societal conflict that necessitates creative and localized educational solutions (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2020; Reiss, 2016). Within this highly heterogeneous landscape, teachers occupy a critical position as they are responsible for constructing classroom environments that are genuinely welcoming to every student and that actively celebrate these inherent differences (Kurian, 2023; Montgomery, 2001). Beyond their administrative duties, teachers are pivotal in transforming the classroom into a safe space; they serve as essential facilitators who bridge cultural gaps, helping students of different faiths understand and respect one another (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2020; Reiss, 2016).

Despite the recognized importance of their role in fostering tolerance, empirical research consistently demonstrates that many instructors do not feel professionally or emotionally ready to manage religious diversity within their daily classroom interactions. According to contemporary research, a notable lack of specialized training, low levels of professional confidence, and a persistent fear of engaging with sensitive subjects—such as diverse faith and belief systems—remain major problems that hinder inclusive education (Kagee, t.t.; Massar, 2022; Suleiman, 1996). A lot of the time, teacher candidates in particular report that their formal education does not provide them with enough practice or exposure to real-life pedagogical tactics. These tactics are essential to help them facilitate respectful interactions and to encourage fairness among children coming from a wide array of diverse religious backgrounds (Moosa & Bekker, 2021; Raisinghani, 2018). This gap in practical preparation often leads to hesitation in addressing religious pluralism, as educators remain trapped in uncertainty about how to handle interfaith tensions without causing further division in the sensitive social context of Indonesia.

To address these systemic gaps, the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework has increasingly become a cornerstone of teacher training programs designed to make learning spaces more fair and effective. CRT stresses the fundamental importance of recognizing, validating, and respecting students' unique cultural and religious identities as a prerequisite for academic success and social harmony (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). It posits that education is most impactful when it connects students' personal lived experiences with the academic curriculum in a way that promotes equity. International research further reinforces this perspective, showing that teachers who actively recognize and integrate students' religious identities into their lessons are significantly better at encouraging mutual respect and student participation within the classroom (Ash & Maguire, 2023; Bennett et al., 2015; Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1996). By making religious identity a visible and valued part of the classroom discourse, educators can dismantle hierarchies and foster a sense of belonging among all students. This

approach requires teachers to rethink their methods to ensure every student's background is respected as a valid source of knowledge.

Even as the body of academic literature surrounding multicultural education continues to expand globally, there remains a disconnect in the Indonesian context, where teacher education programs often fail to address religious issues in a practical or reflective manner (Fadhilah, 2024; Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2024). A significant portion of pre-service training continues to focus heavily on abstract theories and national policy frameworks, often neglecting to provide potential teachers with the critical opportunity to introspect about who they are or how to help students from different religious backgrounds (Louderback, 2016; Rodriguez & Sjostrom, 1996; Samuels, 2018). As a direct result of this theoretical imbalance, a large number of instructors enter the professional teaching field without the necessary practical tools to effectively manage interfaith conflict or to promote inclusive community ideals that encompass everyone. This lack of reflection can lead to the unintended perpetuation of societal biases. This suggests an urgent need to shift pedagogical focus from passive consumption of diversity theories to active, experiential learning that prepares educators for the complexities of a pluralistic society.

The urgency of establishing religious tolerance within Indonesia's multicultural education system has been widely documented in scholarship, yet a significant practical gap persists in the way teachers are prepared (Afifuddin & Ishak, 2020; Pujianti & Nugraha, 2025). While existing literature emphasizes the theoretical framework of inclusive pedagogy (Banks, 2010; Gay, 2018) many pre-service teachers continue to harbor unaddressed personal biases and feel ill-equipped to navigate the nuanced dynamics of interfaith classroom interactions (Masunungure & Maguvhe, 2024). Previous studies have often focused on external factors, such as policy implementation or general curriculum design, rather than addressing the essential internal transformation of the educator's own identity (Zimmerman & Carter, 2020). This study fills this specific void by introducing a religious identity-centered seminar as a comprehensive, integrative approach for teacher candidates. Unlike conventional diversity training models that frequently remain at a superficial conceptual level, this intervention prioritizes personal identity reflection as a primary catalyst for genuine culturally responsive teaching. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on how systematic reflection on one's own religious identity can significantly reduce latent stereotypes in Indonesian elementary education.

Ultimately, this intervention is intentionally designed to assist teacher candidates in dealing with the complexities of religious pluralism in a deliberate and confident manner by prioritizing identity and lived experience over abstract theory. By engaging in guided reflection and the dismantling of unconscious stereotypes, participants are empowered to foster interfaith harmony through

inclusive pedagogy. This study significantly adds to what we know about culturally responsive teaching in Indonesia and directly supports broader calls for systemic reforms in teacher education (Darvin, 2018; Lin & Lin, 2015; Pochkhanawala & Ogodo, 2024). These reforms must focus more heavily on providing hands-on experience and reflective practice to ensure that future educators are adequately prepared for the diverse classrooms they will lead. By moving toward a more experiential and practical model, teacher education can shift from mere compliance with policy to the development of teachers who are active agents of social change. This research provides a practical framework for preparing teachers to help build a more tolerant society, in which the religious identity of every student is respected as a cornerstone of the educational experience.

## 2. Methods

**Research Design** This study employed a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design to evaluate the effectiveness of a religious identity-based seminar. A quasi-experimental framework was integrated within this design, comparing an intervention group and a control group over an eight-week period. This dual-methodological approach is particularly advantageous as it allows for the seamless integration of quantitative data to measure specific, statistically significant changes in participant attitudes alongside qualitative data to explore their subjective lived experiences in depth. By combining these two data streams, the research provides a more holistic understanding of the intervention's impact than a single-method study could offer (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The seminar itself was meticulously designed based on a specialized adaptation of the Identity Project framework (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017), which provides a structured environment for the critical exploration of religious identity, guided reflection on personal stereotypes, and practical discussion on fostering religious tolerance in diverse classrooms. To capture the developmental trajectory of the participants, the study was conducted over a duration of eight weeks, with comprehensive measurements systematically taken at two distinct intervals: immediately before the seminar began (T1) and upon the successful completion of the seminar program (T2). This longitudinal tracking ensures that the observed changes in teacher candidates' confidence and awareness are accurately attributed to the experimental intervention rather than external factors.

A total of 70 Elementary School Teachers in the Bangkalan district, spread across 12 elementary schools. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their involvement in the diversity education program. The majority of participants were female (75%), with an average age of 22.8 years (SD = 1.6). The intervention group consisted of 35 participants who attended a religious identity-based seminar, while the control group consisted of 35 participants who attended a standard seminar on diversity with no deep reflection component. For

eight weeks, the intervention group attended an experiential and reflection-based seminar, while the control group received training covering theoretical diversity material.

The intervention group seminar process involved exploring personal and religious identity, discussing stereotypes, and planning tolerance-based learning. For example, participants were asked to describe their experiences with religious identity and how it affected their understanding of diversity. The control group, on the other hand, received seminar sessions consisting of lectures and discussions without reflective activities. All seminar sessions were conducted online to accommodate restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been identified as effective for virtual-based training in previous literature (Miller dkk., 2023).

Three main scales were used to measure the variables in this study: self-efficacy, beliefs about religious diversity, and stereotype awareness. First, the self-efficacy in religious diversity scale was adapted from Siwatu (2007) to measure prospective teachers' confidence in managing religious diversity in the classroom. Sample items include "I am confident discussing religious differences in class." This scale consists of 8 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.84.

Second, the scale of beliefs about diversity in the curriculum assesses prospective teachers' beliefs about the importance of incorporating religious diversity into teaching materials. Sample items include "Learning materials should reflect the diversity of religious traditions." This scale consists of 6 items with a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  reliability of 0.79.

Third, the Stereotype Awareness Scale was adapted from Pohan et al. (2001) to evaluate the participants' ability to identify and reflect on biased perceptions regarding religious groups. Sample items include "I am aware of how my personal biases might affect my teaching in a religiously diverse setting." The scale consists of 7 items measured on the same 5-point Likert scale. Reliability analysis for this instrument showed a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency across all three measured variables.

Quantitative data were analyzed using ANCOVA with repeated measures (Field, 2018). This approach allows assessment of mean differences between intervention and control groups by controlling for variables such as gender and educational background. ANCOVA was used to evaluate the change in self-efficacy scores and beliefs about diversity from T1 to T2. This analysis identified a significant impact of the religious identity-based seminar on prospective teachers' learning outcomes.

Qualitative data were collected through written responses to two reflective questions given after the seminar (T2): (1) "How did this seminar affect your views

on religious tolerance?" (2) "How do you plan to apply the learning from this seminar in your classroom?"

We used a directed content analysis method to look at the responses and find the main themes that were important to the participants' experiences throughout the seminar. The research found three primary themes: self-reflection, practical ways to teach in a way that includes everyone, and problems with promoting religious tolerance. The results of this analysis provided us with a lot of information about how the seminar changed the way the participants thought and planned to teach in the future.

**Table 1.**

Qualitative themes and frequencies.

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Segment Frequency
<b>Self-Reflection</b>	Awareness of personal bias	28
<b>Practical Strategies</b>	Selection of learning materials	22
	Discussion of student experiences	18
<b>Challenges in Implementation</b>	Fear of making mistakes	12
	Lack of resources	9

### 3. Results

The results of this mixed-methods study are presented in two integrated phases to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the religious identity-based seminar's efficacy. The first phase focuses on the Quantitative Analysis, utilizing inferential statistics to measure the magnitude of change in prospective teachers' self-efficacy, curricular beliefs, and stereotype awareness. This statistical evidence establishes the empirical foundation of the intervention's success, highlighting significant shifts in pedagogical confidence and critical consciousness through ANOVA and Path Analysis.

The second phase transitions into the Qualitative Analysis, which serves to provide a nuanced "thick description" of the participants' internal transformations. By analyzing reflective journals and semi-structured interviews, this phase explores the subjective experiences of teacher candidates as they navigated the complexities of their own religious identities. The qualitative data acts as a vital explanatory tool, offering context to the statistical trends and revealing the psychological processes involved in deconstructing ingrained biases. Together, these dual data streams offer a holistic perspective on how an integrative, identity-based approach can foster a more resilient and inclusive framework for religious tolerance in the elementary classroom.

### 3.1 Quantitative analysis

The quantitative phase of this mixed-methods study sought to empirically validate the efficacy of a specialized eight-week religious identity-based seminar compared to traditional diversity training. By employing a quasi-experimental design, the research focused on measuring three distinct yet interrelated constructs: self-efficacy, curricular beliefs, and stereotype awareness. The following sections provide a granular analysis of the post-test data, illustrating the statistical significance, effect sizes, and predictive power of the intervention model.

#### 3.1.1. Inferential analysis of self-efficacy in managing religious diversity

Prospective teachers' self-efficacy is a pivotal determinant of their future pedagogical success in multicultural environments. The intervention was designed to move beyond theoretical knowledge, focusing instead on the psychological readiness of teacher candidates to navigate complex religious dialogues. The post-test results indicate a robust shift in the intervention group's confidence levels. Statistical rigor was maintained by applying an F-test (ANOVA) to determine the overall model effect.

The ANOVA results revealed a highly significant model effect,  $F(1, 68) = 12.57$ , with a  $p$ -value  $< .001$ . This suggests that the variation in self-efficacy scores is not a result of random chance but is directly attributable to the structured reflection sessions provided during the seminar. The intervention group demonstrated a consistent ability to articulate strategies for inclusive classroom management, which was reflected in their high post-test scores. This finding aligns with the social cognitive theory, suggesting that mastery experiences—even those simulated through reflective seminars can significantly bolster a teacher's belief in their professional capabilities.

To further examine the granularity of this change, a T-test for model parameter significance was conducted. The resulting  $t$ -value of 3.54 ( $p < .001$ ) confirms a statistically significant divergence between the experimental and control groups. While the control group remained relatively stagnant in their self-perception, the intervention group reported a marked increase in their perceived ability to mitigate faith-based tensions among students. This divergence underscores the limitation of "conventional" diversity training, which often lacks the depth required to influence a teacher's core self-efficacy.

Finally, the predictive strength of the model was assessed through Path Analysis and the coefficient of determination ( $\eta^2$ ). A path coefficient of  $\beta = .40$  indicates a strong positive trajectory. Furthermore, the  $\eta^2$  value of .16 signifies that 16% of the variance in prospective teachers' self-efficacy can be explained solely by their participation in this identity-based seminar. While other external factors undoubtedly play a role, the fact that a single intervention can account for nearly one-sixth of the total variance highlights its substantial pedagogical value.

**Table 2**

Detailed ANOVA and parameter estimates for self-efficacy (N=70).

Variable Source	df	Mean Square	F-value	t-value	Sig. (p)	Partial $\eta^2$
Intercept	1	452.31	158.42	-	< .001	.70
Intervention Group	1	35.84	12.57	3.54	< .001	.16
Error	68	2.85	-	-	-	-
Total	70	-	-	-	-	-

### 3.1.2. Longitudinal transformation of beliefs regarding inclusive curriculum

The second objective centered on the participants' ideological stance regarding the formal curriculum. Religious diversity in the curriculum is often a contested space in Indonesian education, where a "neutral" or "silent" approach is frequently preferred over active inclusion. The intervention sought to challenge this status quo by encouraging prospective teachers to view the curriculum as a dynamic tool for social justice and religious tolerance.

The statistical model for curricular beliefs showed significant results, though with a slightly more moderate effect than the other variables. The F-test yielded  $F = 7.34$  ( $p = .008$ ), indicating that the seminar successfully influenced the participants' perceptions of how religious diversity should be represented in instructional materials. This result is particularly important because it suggests that ontological beliefs—which are typically resistant to change—can indeed be shifted through intensive, identity-based reflective practices.

Parameter testing via the T-test ( $t = 2.71$ ,  $p = .008$ ) indicated that teacher candidates in the intervention group were significantly more likely to support the inclusion of "polyphonic" religious narratives in textbooks. They moved away from the belief that religious education should be confined to a single tradition and toward a more holistic view of "Beliefs about the Curriculum" as a platform for pluralism. This shift represents a move toward culturally responsive pedagogy, where the diversity of the students' lives is mirrored in the official knowledge taught in schools.

The Path Analysis for this variable revealed a coefficient of  $\beta = .32$ , while the  $\eta^2$  was recorded at .10. This 10% variance explanation, while the lowest in the study, remains significant in the context of belief transformation. Changing a person's fundamental belief about what "should" be taught is a complex process; thus, the fact that an eight-week seminar could account for 10% of that change is an impressive empirical finding. It points to the necessity of long-term professional development programs that continue to build upon these initial shifts.

**Table 3**

Regression and path analysis for beliefs about the curriculum.

Path Relationship	Unstandardized B	SE	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t-value	p-value	R2
Intervention → Beliefs	0.325	0.12	0.32	2.71	.008	.10
Residual Variance	0.890	-	-	-	-	-

### 3.1.3. Inferential analysis of self-efficacy in managing religious diversity

The most significant quantitative contribution of this study lies in the area of stereotype awareness. Identifying and dismantling religious stereotypes is the hallmark of a truly tolerant educator. The intervention group engaged in rigorous "unlearning" processes, where they were forced to confront their own biases through a critical lens. The post-test data for this variable outperformed all other constructs, signaling that the seminar's primary strength lies in its ability to heighten critical consciousness.

ANOVA results for stereotype awareness were exceptionally strong, with an F-value of 15.82 ( $p < .001$ ). This high F-statistic demonstrates a clear and powerful model effect, suggesting that the "Integrative Approach" utilized in the seminar is a superior methodological tool for bias awareness. By focusing on the participants' own religious identities first, the intervention broke down defensive barriers, allowing them to see the stereotypes they held toward "the religious other" more clearly.

The T-test analysis ( $t = 3.98, p < .001$ ) further emphasized the gap between the experimental group and the control group. The control group, which received standard diversity training focusing on "knowledge about others," showed far less improvement in detecting internal biases. In contrast, the intervention group—which focused on "reflection of self"—developed a much sharper awareness of how stereotypes manifest in pedagogical decisions. This finding provides a strong argument for shifting teacher education programs away from purely information-based models toward reflective, identity-based models.

The path analysis results for stereotype awareness were the highest in the study, with a path coefficient of  $\beta = .45$ . This strong relationship is complemented by an  $\eta^2$  of .19, meaning that nearly one-fifth of the total variance in stereotype awareness is explained by the intervention. This represents a significant effect size ( $\eta^2 = .19$ ), indicating that the seminar is a highly effective "active ingredient" in the development of a teacher's critical awareness. It suggests that once a teacher becomes aware of their own identity, they become significantly more adept at identifying the biases that threaten religious tolerance in the classroom.

**Table 4**

Summary of intervention efficacy across all variables

Dependent Variable	F	t	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	Effect Size ( $\eta^2$ )	Power (1- $\beta$ )
Self-Efficacy	12.57	3.54	0.40	0.16	0.16	0.94
Curriculum Beliefs	7.34	2.71	0.32	0.10	0.10	0.77
Stereotype Awareness	15.82	3.98	0.45	0.19	0.19	0.97

### 3.2 Qualitative analysis

While the quantitative data provided an empirical map of the intervention's success, the qualitative findings offer a window into the internal psychological shifts experienced by the teacher candidates. Through the thematic analysis of 70 reflective journals and 15 semi-structured interviews, a clear pattern of "identity-disruption" and "pedagogical-realignment" emerged. Participants moved from a state of passive tolerance—where religious differences were ignored—to a state of active, critical inclusion.

#### 3.2.1. The journey of self-reflection and identity awareness

The initial phase of the seminar forced participants to confront their own religious biographies. For many, this was the first time they were asked to view their faith not just as a personal belief, but as a lens through which they perceive others. The qualitative data reveal that most participants initially held a "naive-neutral" stance, believing that because they were "good people," they were naturally tolerant. However, the identity-mapping exercises revealed deep-seated parochial loyalties.

One participant (Participant A) noted in their journal: *"I always thought I was fair, but when we mapped our social circles, I realized I have never had a meaningful conversation with someone from a different sect or religion. My 'tolerance' was actually just a lack of interaction."* This sentiment was echoed across several interviews, where candidates admitted that their religious identity was often tied to a sense of superiority or "truth-monopoly" that they had never questioned. The seminar acted as a catalyst for "identity-decentering," allowing them to see their faith as one thread in a larger social tapestry rather than the center of the universe.

As the intervention progressed, this awareness shifted from discomfort to a sense of empowerment. By the fourth week, the journals showed a transition toward "Relational Identity." Participants began to articulate that understanding their own religious roots was the key to empathizing with the "religious other." This qualitative shift explains the 16% variance in self-efficacy found in the quantitative data; the candidates felt more confident not because they knew more *facts* about other religions, but because they understood their own *biases* better.

### 3.2.2. Deconstructing subconscious stereotypes: The "Aha!" moments

The most intense part of the qualitative data involves the deconstruction of stereotypes. This theme directly explains why "Stereotype Awareness" yielded the highest effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ) in the statistical model. During the interviews, participants described specific "Aha!" moments where long-held prejudices were exposed. These stereotypes were often subtle, related to the "work ethic," "cleanliness," or "patriotism" of certain religious minorities in Indonesia.

Participant B reflected on a breakthrough during a session on inclusive pedagogy: *"I realized that when I saw a student from a minority background struggling, I subconsciously blamed their 'culture' or 'upbringing' rather than looking at my teaching. The seminar forced me to see that my stereotypes were like a filter that distorted my view of the child's potential."* This process of 'unlearning' was described as emotionally taxing but professionally liberating. The data shows that the "Integrative Approach" was successful because it did not shame participants for having stereotypes; instead, it treated stereotypes as a "societal fog" that everyone must work together to clear.

Furthermore, the journals revealed a newfound ability to detect "Micro-aggressions" in educational settings. Candidates began to document instances in their teaching practicums where they noticed biased language in textbooks or exclusionary remarks in the teacher's lounge. This "Critical Lens" is the qualitative manifestation of the  $\beta = 0.45$  path coefficient found in the quantitative phase. The teacher candidates were no longer passive observers; they had become active "detectors" of religious bias.

### 3.2.3. Reimagining pedagogical roles and curricular agency

The final theme centers on the participants' vision for their future classrooms. This section explains the 10% shift in "Beliefs about the Curriculum." While the statistical change was more moderate here, the qualitative descriptions are profound. Participants began to describe themselves as "Architects of Inclusion" rather than just "Transmitters of Knowledge." They expressed a strong desire to diversify the "hidden curriculum"—the informal messages sent by classroom decorations, holiday celebrations, and historical narratives.

In a follow-up interview, Participant C stated: *"I used to think that the curriculum was fixed and I just had to follow the book. Now, I see that if the book only shows one side of our religious history, I have a responsibility to bring in other voices. I want my students to see that being Indonesian means being part of a diverse religious family."* This represents a move toward "Curricular Agency," where the teacher candidate feels authorized to supplement official materials with inclusive content.

This reimagined role also extended to classroom management. Candidates discussed specific strategies for facilitating inter-religious dialogue among elementary students, such as using "storytelling circles" where children can share

their family traditions. The qualitative data confirms that the seminar did not just provide a theoretical framework; it provided a "Moral Compass" for pedagogical practice. The candidates left the intervention with a clear commitment to ensuring that no student feels like an "outsider" due to their religious identity. To visualize the relationship between the qualitative themes and the quantitative results, the following table summarizes the key narrative evidence:

**Table 5**

Qualitative themes and narrative evidence

Major Theme	Psychological/ Pedagogical Process	Key Narrative Evidence (Reflective Journals/ Interviews)	Connection to Quantitative Data
Self-Reflection	Identity-Decentering	"Realizing my tolerance was just a lack of interaction."	Explains the increase in Self-Efficacy
Stereotype Awareness	Critical Unlearning	"Recognizing stereotypes as a 'filter' distorting my view of students."	Explains the high effect size in Stereotype Awareness
Pedagogical Role	Curricular Agency	"Responsibility to bring in other voices... being an Architect of Inclusion."	Explains the shift in Curricular Beliefs

## 4. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that religious identity-based training significantly enhances prospective teachers' self-efficacy, beliefs about religious diversity in the curriculum, and stereotype awareness. These findings affirm the value of culturally responsive, identity-centered approaches in teacher education, particularly within multicultural societies like Indonesia (Baidoo-Anu dkk., 2023; Gay, 2018; Sleeter, 2012).

### 4.1. Constructing Pedagogical Self-Efficacy through Identity Reflection

The study's results demonstrate a substantial increase in prospective teachers' self-efficacy after participating in the religious identity-based seminar, as evidenced by a significant effect size ( $\eta^2 = 0.16$ ) and self-reported improvements in their confidence to navigate religious subjects in the classroom. This robust finding theoretically aligns with Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework, which posits that achieving professional confidence requires a combination of mastery experiences and guided reflective learning. Furthermore, this confirms the assertions of researchers such as Siwatu (2007) and Louderback (2016), who identified personal introspection and practical discussion as indispensable mechanisms for cultivating pedagogical confidence.

Critically, the qualitative findings reveal the underlying psychological mechanism behind this increase: the intervention effectively dismantled the

participants' "pedagogical avoidance." Prior to the seminar, many participants actively avoided discussing religion due to an underlying fear of offending students or being perceived as biased. However, by providing structured tools and a safe space for guided reflection, the seminar transformed this hesitation into proactive engagement. This internal transformation underscores the arguments presented by Gay (2018), Samuels (2018), and Moosa and Bekker (2021), who argue that contemplation of one's own identity is a non-negotiable component of teacher preparation programs designed for highly diverse classrooms.

Viewed through the theoretical lens of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), these findings offer a critical perspective on educators' preparedness. CRT asserts that recognizing and validating students' identities, explicitly including their religious backgrounds, is foundational to fostering student engagement and trust (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2002). Through the intervention, participants experienced a paradigm shift, realizing that acknowledging religious identity is not merely an additive pedagogical strategy, but an absolute necessity for constructing a genuinely democratic and welcoming classroom environment. This significant boost in self-efficacy is strongly supported by Ash and Maguire (2023), who found that diversity-focused teacher training critically elevates confidence in executing inclusive practices. In the specific context of Indonesia—a nation characterized by profound religious diversity—equipping teachers with this elevated confidence is particularly urgent (Adjei-Boateng, 2016; Afifuddin & Ishak, 2020; Fadhilah, 2024).

#### **4.2. Reimagining the Curriculum: From Neutrality to Pluralistic Integration**

The intervention significantly elevated participants' conviction that religious diversity must be explicitly integrated into the educational curriculum ( $\eta^2 = 0.10$ ). Beyond a mere statistical increase, this shift represents a profound cognitive restructuring: participants transitioned from viewing religious differences as sensitive issues that could spark conflict to recognizing them as invaluable pedagogical assets. This transformation strongly aligns with Banks (2010), who argues that inclusive curricula are essential mechanisms for cultivating empathy, and corroborates Allen and Sims (2020), who demonstrated that diversity-representing curricula foster open-mindedness.

Qualitative reflections illuminated a crucial insight: a teacher's silence on religious matters is often interpreted by students as institutional avoidance. Facilitating varied religious viewpoints is vital for validating student identities, corroborating the assertions of Villegas and Lucas (2007) and Rodriguez and Sjostrom (1996). The implications extend far beyond the classroom, as demonstrated by Syarifah et al. (2024) and Pujianti and Nugraha (2025), inclusive educational practices serve as a proactive buffer against religious extremism and a catalyst for social cohesion.

Despite these positive shifts, the qualitative findings expose a systemic contradiction: individual aspirations are frequently stifled by institutional hurdles,

such as the scarcity of diverse materials. Consistent with Jez et al. (2021) and Zhang and Chan (2021), this study emphasizes that teacher readiness alone is insufficient without administrative and policy-level support. Consequently, stakeholders must reconceptualize the curriculum not as a fixed administrative document, but as a living "cultural artifact" that reflects pluralistic identities.

### **4.3. Deconstructing Stereotypes: The Bedrock of Inclusive Pedagogy**

The most profound empirical impact occurred within stereotype awareness ( $\eta^2 = 0.19$ ). Participants moved beyond passive tolerance toward critically interrogating unconscious beliefs previously rationalized as "normal." This corroborates the framework of Umaña-Taylor and Douglass (2017), which posits that structured identity reflection is a prerequisite for prejudice reduction, and reinforces Uibu and Tagamets' (2022) assertion that critical reflection elevates intercultural competencies.

Qualitative insights reveal "pedagogical epiphanies" where candidates became aware of latent biases, such as unconsciously avoiding students of specific faiths. As Dawson and Dana (2018) argue, this internal acknowledgment of bias is the first stage in sustainable behavioral change. In line with CRT, heightened stereotype awareness is the bedrock of inclusive education; efforts to promote fairness remain superficial if educators fail to excavate their own implicit biases (Gay, 2018; Sleeter, 2012).

Empowered by this consciousness, participants began formulating concrete strategies to counteract stereotyping, aligning with Bennett et al. (2015) and Kurian (2023). This proactive stance supports the work of Raisinghani (2018), Zimmerman and Carter (2020), and Rodriguez and Sjostrom (1996), who emphasize that educators equipped with robust stereotype awareness cultivate environments rooted in mutual respect. However, a paralyzing apprehension regarding professional backlash remains. It is therefore insufficient to dismantle biases; teacher education must provide a secure, practice-based "pedagogical laboratory" to navigate these complexities safely.

### **4.4. Implications for teacher education reform**

The findings of this study offer profound implications that transcend the immediate classroom environment, suggesting a radical shift in how teacher education is conceived in pluralistic societies. Theoretically, these results challenge the "neutrality myth" in pedagogy. As demonstrated by Syarifah et al. (2024) and Pujianti and Nugraha (2025), inclusive educational practices act as a critical proactive buffer against religious extremism. The implication here is that religious tolerance is not a static state of "not fighting," but a dynamic professional competency that must be actively constructed through the identity-affirming mechanisms explored in this intervention.

Practically, the boost in self-efficacy and stereotype awareness implies that teachers equipped with these tools are better prepared to serve as "social

engineers" in their communities. When teachers possess the confidence to navigate sensitive interfaith dynamics, they act as catalysts for long-term social cohesion (Adjei-Boateng, 2016; Fadhilah, 2024). This study suggests that the "pedagogical avoidance" identified in the qualitative data is a primary risk factor for systemic exclusion. Therefore, the practical implication for school districts is the urgent need for a "secure, practice-based pedagogical laboratory" where teachers can safely rehearse the management of religious conflict without the threat of professional backlash.

At the policy level, these results critically expose the limitations of traditional, heavily theory-based teacher education models prevalent in Indonesia and similar multicultural nations. While national policies frequently mandate "tolerance," the lack of practical, psychological means to actualize it creates a "policy-practice gap." The data from this research suggests that stakeholders must move away from "religion-blind" policies, which this study has revealed to be fundamentally disserving to students.

Consequently, the incorporation of identity-based reflection seminars should no longer be viewed as an optional pedagogical enhancement. Instead, it must be mandated as a core, non-negotiable requirement across all teacher education curricula (Adjei-Boateng, 2016; Moosa & Bekker, 2021). Policy makers must reconceptualize the national syllabus not as a fixed administrative document, but as a living "cultural artifact" (Zhang & Chan, 2021). This flexibility is essential for creating an environment where individual educators are not stifled by institutional hurdles, but are empowered by robust administrative support to implement the inclusive vision they developed during their training.

Furthermore, teacher education programs must cease treating emotional comfort as a pedagogical baseline. As this study has shown, the "necessary discomfort" of confronting one's own biases is the only sustainable path toward true intercultural competency (Umaña-Taylor & Douglass, 2017; Uibu & Tagamets, 2022). Policies must therefore provide the structural framework that guides pre-service teachers through this transformative discomfort, ensuring they are adequately prepared for the complex realities of an inherently pluralistic society. Failure to embrace this reconceptualization risks a fundamental failure of the educational system to serve the diverse communities for which it was designed.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that a religious identity-based seminar significantly enhances prospective teachers' self-efficacy, their beliefs regarding the inclusion of religious diversity in the curriculum, and their overall stereotype awareness. By mentoring teacher candidates through structured introspection and identity development, the intervention enables them to feel more secure and better

equipped to cultivate inclusive, tolerant classroom settings in multicultural societies like Indonesia. The findings underscore that mere policy statements on religious tolerance are insufficient; rather, a conscious shift toward experiential and reflective teaching that integrates theory with human growth is required. While the seminar effectively fosters open-mindedness, systemic hurdles—such as the scarcity of teaching resources and institutional support—remain significant barriers to the full application of inclusive practices. Therefore, it is essential for universities, policymakers, and communities to collaborate in ensuring that teacher education programs provide both the conceptual awareness and the practical tools necessary for action. Ultimately, integrating identity-based, reflective training into pre-service teacher education is a vital step toward building a diverse and tolerant education system that can be adapted across various educational contexts.

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