



## Values of Multicultural Education in the Perspective of the Qur'an: An Analysis of Surah Al-Mumtahanah, Verse 8



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### Abstract

Religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity challenges global harmony. Multicultural education, which values differences, offers a framework within Islam, but its scriptural basis needs investigation. This study formulates core values of multicultural education from Qur'anic Surah Al-Mumtahanah (60):8 through thematic interpretive analysis. A qualitative library-based design using thematic analysis (*tafsir tahlili*) was employed. Primary data sources were authoritative classical and contemporary exegeses of the verse. Data collection involved documentation of primary texts and peer-reviewed articles. Thematic analysis proceeded through open, axial, and selective coding to identify and synthesize key educational values. Two principal values emerged. First, the imperative to do good towards non-hostile non-Muslims, encompassing mutual help, gift-giving, and family ties. Second, the command to act justly, conceptualized as multidimensional fairness; political, social, ethical, that is proportional and respects individual rights. These commands are general and un-abrogated, applying to all non-hostile non-Muslims. Surah Al-Mumtahanah:8 provides a foundational mandate for an Islamic model of multicultural education centered on active goodness and comprehensive justice, reframing interfaith interaction from passive tolerance to proactive, equitable engagement. This study offers a clear scriptural basis for developing inclusive, justice-oriented curricula in pluralistic societies like Indonesia.

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## INTRODUCTION

Discourse on harmony and peaceful coexistence is a central aspiration for humanity, transcending social strata, religion, ethnicity, and culture. No religion in the world explicitly teaches its adherents to engage in anarchy or hostility; every sacred text emphasizes peace and inter-religious tranquility. However, the very reality of religious diversity inevitably generates complex dynamics within multicultural societies (Daruhadi, 2024; Meinert, 2020). This inherent diversity, recognized in Islamic theology as *sunnatullah* (divine law of plurality), necessitates a robust educational framework capable of transforming potential conflict into constructive synergy.

Contemporary scholarship on multicultural education has largely been developed within Western secular frameworks (Banks, 2015; Sleeter, 2018), focusing on race, ethnicity, and social class. Within Islamic education, recent studies have begun exploring Qur'anic themes of diversity (Gozali, 2023; Khondoker et al., 2024). Hamka's *Tafsir Al-Azhar* (2015) and Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Misbah* (2012) have provided seminal, yet general, Indonesian interpretations of justice and interfaith relations. Research specifically on Surah Al-Mumtahanah has often focused on its political-juridical aspects (Faldiansyah, 2019) rather than explicit pedagogical values for multicultural education. International literature on Islamic education and intercultural competence (Jackson, 2014; Zine, 2008) acknowledges the potential of Qur'anic ethics but calls for more verse-specific pedagogical formulations.

Despite rich discussions on Islamic tolerance, a clear gap remains: the systematic extraction of concrete and operational values for *multicultural education* from specific Qur'anic verses, particularly Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8. Existing studies often discuss the verse's legal context (who Muslims may befriend) without translating its core principles, *birr* (goodness) and *qisth* (justice), into a structured educational framework. Therefore, the novelty of this research lies in its explicit pedagogical lens, moving from theological interpretation to the formulation of actionable principles for curriculum design and classroom practice in pluralistic settings, situated firmly within the Indonesian and broader global Islamic context. Furthermore, this present study aims to elucidate the *asbabun nuzul* (historical context of revelation) of Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8, identify and interpret the core concepts of Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8 relevant to multicultural education, specifically the concepts of *birr* and *qisth*, and formulate the values of multicultural education derived from this verse as a normative framework for inter-communal relations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Multicultural Education Theory

This study is anchored in two interrelated theoretical frameworks. First, Multicultural Education Theory, as articulated by Banks (2016) and Gorski (2009), which posits that education must actively challenge systemic inequality and integrate diverse perspectives across five dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and empowering school culture. Second, Islamic Ethical Tafsir, which interprets the Qur'an not merely as a legal text but as a source of moral and pedagogical guidance. Key concepts include *birr* (comprehensive righteousness extending beyond ritual piety to social welfare), *'adl* (general justice), and *qisth* (equitable fairness, often associated with proportional distribution and legal integrity) (Esposito, 2021). The integration of these frameworks allows the analysis to move from exegetical detail to educational application.

## METHODS

### Research Design

This research employed qualitative approach with library-based research design using thematic interpretative analysis (Creswell, 2018). It is a form of *tafsir tahlili* (analytical exegesis) which focused on a single verse to extract its educational meanings.

### Data Collection

The primary data corpus consisted of the Arabic text of Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8 and its classical and contemporary *tafsir* (exegeses). Purposive sampling was used to select authoritative sources: classical works (Al-Tabari, Al-Qurtubi, Ibn Arabi) and contemporary works (Hamka's *Tafsir Al-Azhar*, Quraish Shihab's *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, Sayyid Qutb's *Fi Zilal al-*

*Qur'an*). Secondary data include peer-reviewed articles on multicultural education from databases like Scopus and Google Scholar (2015-2024). The research instrument was a thematic coding sheet developed by the researcher. Data collection followed the procedure of documentation (Bowen, 2009), systematically gathering and cataloging all relevant textual data from the identified sources

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six thematic analysis. The first was familiarization which means repeated reading of the verse and its exegeses. The second was open coding through identifying initial concepts (for instance, *lam yuqatilukum*, *tabarruhum*, *tuqsithu*, *asbabun nuzul*). Next was generating themes by refining themes to ensure they accurately represent the data and directly address the research objectives. The fifth step consisted of defining and naming the themes, culminating in the identification of two primary themes: (1) the Imperative of Active Goodness (*Birr*) and (2) the Imperative of Comprehensive Justice (*Qisth*). Last was writing the report by contextualizing the themes within the theoretical framework.

### **Trustworthiness and Limitations**

Trustworthiness was ensured through several points; credibility: triangulation of multiple tafsir sources (classical and contemporary), dependability and confirmability: an audit trail of coding decisions and interpretations was maintained, and transferability: thick description of the verse's context and exegetical debates is provided to allow readers to assess applicability to other educational contexts.

In addition, this research is confined to the interpretation of a single Qur'anic verse. Its findings are normative and theoretical, not empirical. Future empirical research is needed to test the application of these values in actual educational settings (schools, universities). The analysis is also dependent on the accessibility and quality of existing tafsir literature.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Asbabun Nuzul* as a Pedagogical Context for Interfaith Relations**

The historical context reveals that the verse was revealed regarding Asma' bint Abi Bakr and her polytheist mother. Asma' hesitated to receive her mother's gifts due to prior prohibitions against befriending belligerent polytheists (verse 1). The Prophet's command, following revelation of verse 8, was to accept the gift and maintain the family tie. This establishes a critical pedagogical principle: hostility is not based on belief alone, but on hostile actions. It provides a precedent for distinguishing between non-hostile non-Muslims and active enemies.

### **The Imperative of Active Goodness (*Birr*)**

The command *tabarruhum* (that you do good to them), from the root *birr*, appears repeatedly. Exegetes (Ibn Arabi, Al-Shihab) emphasize that *birr* here is extensive, encompassing all forms of virtue: mutual help (*ta'awun*), gift-giving, maintaining family relations, and general social kindness. The condition is the absence of hostility (*lam yuqatilukum*) and expulsion (*wa lam yukhrijukum*). This is an *active* command for kindness, not merely passive tolerance.

### **The Imperative of Comprehensive Justice (*Qisth*)**

The command *an tuqsithu ilayhim* (that you act justly toward them) uses *qisth*, denoting equitable fairness. Classical scholars like Ibn Arabi interpreted this as giving a portion of one's wealth (e.g., gifts, charity). Contemporary exegesis (Qutb, Hamka, Khudori via Abu Muslim, 2018) expands this to multidimensional justice: political, legal, social, and ethical. The verse

explicitly states God loves the just (*al-muqsithin*). The analysis identified four operational dimensions of *qisth* from the text; legal justice (fair treatment irrespective of faith), social justice (fair distribution of resources and social engagement), ethical justice (proportional and sincere conduct, free from oppression), and humanistic justice (recognizing shared humanity as the basis for fairness). Furthermore, the findings also confirm that according to the majority of exegetes cited (Al-Qurtubi, Thabari, Hamka), this verse is *muhkam* (unequivocal) and general, not abrogated (*mansukh*) nor limited to the Meccan polytheists. It applies to all non-Muslims who are not actively fighting Muslims.

The findings reveal that Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8 reframes the Muslim relationship with non-hostile religious others from one of potential avoidance to one of proactive ethical engagement. The values of *birr* and *qisth* are not merely supererogatory virtues but are presented as normative commands. The distinction based on *action* (fighting/expelling) rather than *identity* (non-Muslim) is a critical hermeneutical key that promotes contextual judgment over blanket prejudice. These findings extend and refine prior work. While Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (2001), Waskito & Rohman (2018), and Gozali (2023) noted the general principle of fairness, this study provides a more granular, thematic breakdown of *birr* and *qisth* as educational constructs. It aligns with Sayyid Qutb's assertion that Islam is inherently a religion of peace, only responding to aggression. However, this study moves beyond purely legal or political commentary to explicitly frame these principles as the core of a *multicultural education* model. This resonates with international frameworks (Banks, 2016) but provides a distinctly Islamic theological foundation, addressing calls from scholars like Zine (2008) for more grounded, scripture-based Islamic pedagogies.

The primary theoretical contribution of this study lies in the formulation of a Qur'anic model for multicultural education grounded in Surah Al-Mumtahanah (8). This model emphasizes that, at the epistemological level, understanding and engaging with the "other" is not only permissible but essential for the realization of *birr* (active goodness) and *qisth* (justice). At the pedagogical level, the model highlights the importance of equity-based teaching practices and prejudice reduction as direct manifestations of *qisth*, ensuring that all students are treated fairly regardless of their backgrounds. At the curricular level, it advocates for the integration of inclusive content, including positive historical narratives of non-Muslims who coexisted peacefully with early Muslim communities. Through this framework, the study challenges the assumption that authentic Islamic education is inherently exclusionary, instead demonstrating a strong scriptural foundation for justice, inclusivity, and active goodness within a pluralistic society.

Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for Islamic education and policymaking in pluralistic societies. For Islamic schools and madrasas, Surah Al-Mumtahanah (8) can serve as a foundational basis for developing curricular modules on interfaith citizenship, promoting values of coexistence and mutual respect. For educational policymakers in countries such as Indonesia, the findings provide a strong religious justification for advancing *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation) and anti-discrimination policies within the education system. In addition, teacher training programs can utilize the *birr* framework to design classroom strategies that foster inclusive learning environments, encourage cooperation, and strengthen respect across religious boundaries. However, this study is limited by its normative and text-based approach, as it does not empirically assess how these values are currently implemented in educational settings. Future research is therefore needed to address this gap by conducting empirical studies, such as surveys or case analyses, to evaluate the application of *birr* and *qisth* in Islamic schools. Furthermore, the development and validation of a psychometric scale measuring "Qur'anic-based multicultural attitudes" would contribute to more robust analysis. Comparative exegesis of other relevant Qur'anic verses, such as Al-Baqarah (256) and Al-Hujurat (13), is also recommended to strengthen the proposed educational framework.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to reveal the values of multicultural education in Qs. Al-Mumtahanah:8. Through systematic thematic analysis of classical and contemporary exegesis, it concludes that the verse provides a robust scriptural mandate for two core educational values: the imperative to do active good (*birr*) and the imperative to enact comprehensive justice (*qisth*) towards all non-hostile non-Muslims. These values are not abrogated but are general commands for all contexts. The study's key contribution is the translation of these theological-legal principles into a coherent, operational framework for multicultural Islamic education, positioning justice and proactive kindness as central pedagogical goals for fostering harmony in diverse societies. This framework offers both a theoretical foundation for curriculum reform and an ethical compass for inter-communal relations from an authentically Islamic perspective.

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