

Multicultural Education in the Islamic Perspective

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Article Info :	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 18-05-2026 Approved: 25-06-2026 Published: 25-08-2026	Multicultural education has become an important approach to building a harmonious society amid social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity, and Indonesia's pluralism makes it especially relevant as intolerance, discrimination, and religiously based conflict persist. Although the Islamic values of ta'aruf and tasamuh are widely discussed, the value of 'adl (justice) remains comparatively neglected in educational contexts, and empirical studies of its implementation in Indonesian Islamic institutions are scarce. This study aims to examine the concept of multicultural education from an Islamic perspective by emphasizing the values of ta'aruf, tasamuh, and 'adl contained in the Qur'an and Hadith. It uses a library research method with a qualitative descriptive design, operationalized as thematic content analysis of primary religious texts and peer-reviewed literature published between 2015 and 2025, analyzed through the interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The results identify three recurring value clusters, the Medina Charter as their institutionalized exemplar, and four implementation levers curriculum content, learning method, school regulation and culture, and teacher exemplarity that align with Banks's dimensions of multicultural education. These findings imply that Islamic-based multicultural education can shape inclusive, humane, and tolerant learners while grounding multicultural practice in religiously internal authority rather than externally imposed norms.
Keywords: multicultural education; Islam; tolerance; ta'aruf; tasamuh	

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity of culture, language, and religion is a defining condition of contemporary societies, and the way education responds to it has become a global rather than a local concern. Unesco, (2006) issued its guidelines on intercultural education on the premise that schooling in plural societies must be deliberately designed to teach living together, because contact between groups does not by itself produce mutual understanding. The comparative evidence assembled by Banks and Banks (2019) points in the same direction:

prejudice, segregation, and unequal educational outcomes persist across widely different national systems, which indicates that the problem is structural rather than incidental.

Political theory reaches a parallel conclusion, in that [Kymlicka, \(1995\)](#) argue that plural societies remain stable only when difference is accommodated through recognised rights and shared institutions rather than through arrangements imposed from outside the communities concerned. Education is therefore the arena in which the capacity to live with difference is either cultivated deliberately or left to chance.

Indonesia is widely recognized as a country with a very high level of diversity. This diversity can be seen from the large number of ethnic groups, regional languages, customs, cultures, and religions that exist and develop within society. The scale of that diversity is well documented: drawing on the national population census, record more than 1,300 self-identified ethnic categories, which they reclassify into 633 distinct ethnic groups, alongside hundreds of regional languages and six officially recognised religions.

Such conditions make Indonesia one of the largest multicultural countries in the world. Diversity is essentially a national asset that can strengthen unity if it is managed properly through education, social policies, and the formation of an inclusive social character. However, on the other hand, diversity can also trigger conflict if society lacks awareness in respecting and understanding differences. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to instill values of tolerance, respect for diversity, and the spirit of unity in social life.

In recent years, Indonesian society has continued to face various social problems related to intolerance, discrimination, and conflicts based on religion and culture. National monitoring corroborates this observation. The SETARA Institute (2025), in its annual review of the condition of freedom of religion and belief, records that violations continued to occur throughout 2024 and characterises the period as a regression taking place in the midst of political transition, with disturbances to houses of worship and restrictions on minority congregations among its recurring categories of concern.

Comparable evidence from local studies of interreligious relations indicates that acceptance of the religious other cannot be taken for granted even where coexistence is long established: Anas et al., [\(2025\)](#) show that, in a city widely regarded as inclusive, such acceptance depends on deliberate policies and educational strategies rather than on shared residence alone. Hefner (2009) situates such tensions within the politics of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, showing that schools are not bystanders to these dynamics

but sites through which competing visions of the plural society are transmitted.

These phenomena indicate that multicultural awareness within society has not yet developed optimally. Differences are often viewed as threats rather than social wealth that must be appreciated. This condition not only affects social relations within society but also influences the stability of national life. Therefore, education has an important role in shaping people's mindset so that they are able to accept and respect diversity as part of social life.

Education is a very strategic means of building students' character. Education does not only aim to improve intellectual abilities but also to shape students' social, moral, and spiritual attitudes. In the context of multicultural societies, education needs to be directed toward forming attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and appreciation for differences. Education that only focuses on academic aspects without paying attention to social character formation will produce generations who are intellectually intelligent but lack concern for the social life around them.

In the Indonesian case, however, the difficulty lies less in the absence of aspiration than in the absence of grounded translation. Raihani, (2014) finds that although national policy expresses multicultural aims, their realisation is largely left to individual schools, and Setyono & Widodo, (2019) demonstrate through critical discourse analysis that nationally endorsed teaching materials may themselves narrow the representation of diversity rather than widen it. Afifuddin et al., (2025) reach a convergent conclusion for the centralised Indonesian system, finding that teachers' understanding of multicultural values remains uneven and largely dependent on individual interpretation rather than on systematic curricular support.

The concept of multicultural education emerged as an approach considered capable of addressing the challenges of diversity in modern society. Multicultural education seeks to instill values of equality, respect for human rights, and awareness that every individual has a different background. Through multicultural education, students are expected to understand social realities more broadly and avoid discriminatory and intolerant attitudes. Multicultural education also helps students develop the ability to cooperate with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Recent empirical work reinforces this expectation: Saleh et al., (2025), examining three senior high schools in a culturally diverse Indonesian region, show that multiculturalism is enacted less through formal curriculum than through everyday practices of religious accommodation, inclusive rules, and cross-group interaction.

Multicultural education is an educational approach that emphasizes respect for cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic, and social diversity among students. Banks (2016) explains that multicultural education aims to create equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of their backgrounds. Banks develops this aim across several dimensions, among them content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy, and the empowering of school culture and social structure, which together indicate that multicultural education operates at the level of institutional arrangement and not of attitude alone.

Sleeter & Grant, (2008) order the available approaches along a comparable axis culminating in a social-reconstructionist orientation directed at inequality itself, while Gay, (2018); Nieto, (1992) treat the sociopolitical context of schooling and the cultural stance of the teacher as themselves pedagogical. Multicultural education also seeks to develop students' abilities to understand diverse social realities so that they can live peacefully side by side.

In general, multicultural education does not only focus on recognizing differences but also instills values of social justice and respect for human rights. In practice, multicultural education encourages the creation of inclusive, democratic, and discrimination-free learning environments. Through multicultural education, students are taught to understand that differences are not threats but social wealth that must be appreciated.

From an Islamic perspective, diversity is viewed as *sunnatullah* or Allah's decree that must be accepted positively. Islam teaches that all human beings come from the same source and possess equal status before Allah SWT. Differences in ethnicity, language, culture, and religion are not reasons to demean one another, but rather means to know each other and strengthen social relationships. These values are reflected in the Qur'an and Hadith, which emphasize the importance of tolerance, justice, and respect for the rights of others. Empirical support for the educational relevance of these values is provided by Aderibigbe et al., (2023), whose evaluation of an Islamic-values-based general education course found that grounding tolerance and respect for diversity in Islamic principles helped students internalise care and compassion for others.

Islam as a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* has social concepts that are highly relevant to multicultural education. Islamic teachings not only regulate the relationship between humans and God but also govern relationships among humans in social life. Prophet Muhammad SAW provided a real

example of how to build a harmonious society amidst diversity through the Medina Charter.

The charter demonstrates that Islam from the beginning taught the principle of peaceful coexistence within pluralistic societies. Hashim et al., (2015); Sachedina, (2001) locate in sources of this kind the internal Islamic grounds of pluralism and of moderation. Islam as a universal religion places great attention on harmonious social life. Multicultural education in Islam is based on principles of human equality, tolerance, justice, and respect for the rights of others. The Qur'an and Hadith provide many guidelines regarding how humans should live side by side amidst diversity.

The concept of *ta'āruf* in Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13 becomes an important foundation in Islamic multicultural education. The verse affirms that humans were created differently so that they may know and understand one another. Differences should not be used as reasons to demean others but rather as means to strengthen social relationships.

In addition, the concept of *tasāmuḥ* or tolerance is also an important part of Islamic education. Islam teaches that there is no compulsion in religion, as explained in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256. This verse shows that Islam respects individual freedom in determining one's beliefs. To these two values the Qur'an joins a third, *'adl* or justice, which Surah al-Mā'idah verse 8 and Surah al-Nisā' verse 135 establish as an obligation binding even towards those one dislikes and even when it operates against oneself or one's own kin; Zainuddin (2021) traces the concept of *ta'āruf* in the Qur'an and its relevance to social life.

Read together, this body of work establishes that Islamic sources are rich in multicultural content and that Indonesian Islamic education is a plausible site for its cultivation. What it leaves open is threefold: *'adl* is consistently named but rarely analysed as a value carrying structural implications; Islamic values and contemporary multicultural education theory are usually presented side by side rather than synthesised within a single framework; and the Medina Charter is generally narrated as historical illustration rather than examined as evidence that Islamic normative sources can generate institutional, and not merely attitudinal, responses to diversity.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing precisely those three openings. It treats *'adl* as a co-equal third value alongside *ta'āruf* and *tasāmuḥ* and analyses it as the value that governs the distribution of treatment and therefore reaches the structural level at which schooling either reproduces or corrects inequality. It synthesises the three values with the dimensions of multicultural education formulated by Banks, (2015) within one comparative

framework, so that each Qur'anic and Prophetic basis is aligned with an educational implication and with a corresponding theoretical dimension rather than merely juxtaposed with it. And it reads the Medina Charter analytically, as the institutionalised exemplar of these values, in order to show that the Islamic contribution to multicultural education is distinguished not by the content of its prescriptions, which converges substantially with the international literature, but by the source of its authority.

The urgency of undertaking this study now follows from the conjunction of those gaps with the national situation. The monitoring data cited above indicate that intolerance in Indonesia has not receded, while the curricular openings through which multicultural content might enter Islamic schooling remain, as Raihani, (2014) observes, dependent on interpretation at the level of the individual school.

In such a setting, multicultural education presented to Islamic institutions as an external or imported norm is unlikely to command durable commitment, whereas a formulation grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah renders the same practice religiously obligatory for the communities concerned. Articulating that grounding systematically, and identifying the points at which it bears on institutional arrangements rather than on attitudes alone, is therefore a present rather than a deferrable task.

Proceeding from this reasoning, the study aims to examine the concept of multicultural education from an Islamic perspective by emphasising the values of *ta'āruf*, *tasāmuḥ*, and *'adl* contained in the Qur'an and Hadith; to analyse the Medina Charter as the institutionalised exemplar of those values; and to formulate the levers through which they can be translated into Islamic educational practice, aligned with the dimensions of multicultural education established in the existing theoretical literature.

The benefits of the study are addressed to several audiences. For teachers in madrasah and pesantren, it offers a religiously grounded rationale for practices of acquaintance, tolerance, and equitable treatment that can be enacted through curriculum content, learning method, school regulation, and personal example. For curriculum developers and policymakers, it identifies the specific points at which multicultural aims can be attached to existing Islamic educational structures rather than appended alongside them.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the multicultural education literature an account in which multicultural commitments are legitimated from within a religious tradition, which is the condition that Kymlicka, (1995); Parekh, (2001) identify as necessary for stable plural arrangements. Practically, it implies that policy addressed to Islamic educational institutions

is likely to be more effective when expressed in the normative vocabulary those institutions already regard as binding.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a library research method with a qualitative descriptive approach. The library research method was chosen because this study focuses on analyzing the concept of multicultural education from an Islamic perspective through various relevant literature sources. Library research was selected because the object of inquiry is a body of texts rather than a field setting: the research questions concern what the Qur'an, the Hadith, and the scholarly literature state about diversity, and these are accessible only through documentary sources (Zed, 2008).

Epistemologically, the study rests on an interpretive position which holds that meaning is constructed through the systematic reading of texts in their context rather than measured through instruments. Within this position, the qualitative descriptive design is operationalised more precisely as thematic content analysis in the sense of Krippendorff, (2018), in which manifest textual units are coded into categories and the categories are then interpreted against the study's conceptual framework.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the Qur'an and Hadith related to the concepts of diversity, tolerance, and justice in Islam. Secondary data were obtained from books, scientific journals, academic articles, and previous studies relevant to Islamic multicultural education. The scope of the literature was bounded explicitly. Searches were conducted in Google Scholar, DOAJ, Scopus-indexed outlets accessible through publisher portals, and the Garuda national repository, using the keyword combinations "multicultural education", "Islamic education", "tolerance", "ta'aruf", "tasāmuḥ", "adl", and "Medina Charter" in both English and Indonesian.

Inclusion criteria were: (a) peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, or institutional reports; (b) publication between 2015 and 2025, with the exception of seminal theoretical works and classical primary sources; and (c) substantive treatment of multicultural education, Islamic educational values, or religious diversity in Indonesia. Excluded were popular articles, non-academic web content, and studies whose engagement with the theme was incidental. The procedure yielded the corpus of sources listed in the references. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and literature review. Researchers collected various references related to multicultural education, tolerance in Islam, the example

of Prophet Muhammad SAW, and the implementation of Islamic education in pluralistic societies.

Consistent with the nature of qualitative library research, the researchers themselves acted as the human instrument, supported by a literature review matrix used as a coding sheet. The matrix recorded, for each source, the bibliographic identity, the Islamic value or theoretical concept addressed, the textual basis cited, and the educational implication proposed; primary religious texts were entered in a parallel matrix recording the verse or narration, its thematic category, and its interpretive context. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The collected data were analyzed systematically to discover the relationship between multicultural education concepts and Islamic values.

The three-stage analytical sequence of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification follows the interactive model of Miles et al., (2014), which is cited here as the source of the analytical framework. Trustworthiness was pursued through source triangulation, in which every substantive claim was checked against at least two independent sources, and through credibility assessment of the literature, in which preference was given to peer-reviewed and indexed outlets and to recognised translations of primary religious texts (Elo et al., 2014). Interpretations of Qur'anic verses and Hadith were cross-checked against established exegetical and scholarly works rather than derived directly by the researchers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The review of the corpus produced three sets of findings. First, at the level of primary sources, the analysis identified three recurring value clusters in the Qur'an and Hadith that bear directly on the treatment of difference: ta'aruf (mutual acquaintance), tasāmuḥ (tolerance), and 'adl (justice). Second, at the level of historical practice, the Medina Charter was found to be the single most frequently cited exemplar of these values in institutionalised form.

Third, at the level of educational translation, the literature converges on four implementation levers: curriculum content, learning method, school regulation and culture, and teacher exemplarity. Table 1 displays the synthesis of these findings by aligning each value with its textual basis, its educational implication, and the corresponding dimension of multicultural education formulated by (Banks, 2015).

Table 1. Synthesis of Islamic values, their textual basis, educational implications, and corresponding dimensions of multicultural education

Islamic value	Qur'anic and Prophetic basis	Educational implication	Corresponding Banks, (2015) dimension
<i>Ta'āruf</i> (mutual acquaintance)	QS al-Hujurāt: 13; the Prophet's practice of introducing and pairing groups in Medina	Curriculum content that introduces learners to the histories, languages, and customs of other groups; structured cross-cultural encounter and dialogue	Content integration; knowledge construction
<i>Tasāmuh</i> (tolerance)	QS al-Baqarah: 256; the narration of Abū Dāwūd protecting non-Muslims under covenant	Learning that reduces prejudice, forbids coercion in belief, and models respect for the convictions of others	Prejudice reduction
<i>ʿAdl</i> (justice)	QS al-Mā'idah: 8; QS al-Nisā': 135; the Medina Charter's equality of rights and shared responsibility	Equitable treatment of learners regardless of background; non-discriminatory assessment and school regulation; inclusive access	Equity pedagogy; empowering school culture and social structure

Source: Data Processed

Two further observations follow from the corpus. The value of 'adl appears in the literature less frequently than ta'āruf and tasāmuh in explicitly educational contexts, even though it is the value with the clearest structural implications for school policy; and empirical studies of implementation in Indonesian Islamic institutions remain comparatively scarce relative to normative expositions. Both observations are taken up in the discussion below and again in the limitations.

Discussion

The Concept of Diversity in the Qur'an

Islam views diversity as *sunnatullah* or Allah's decree that cannot be avoided in human life. Diversity in ethnicity, culture, language, and religion is part of social reality that must be accepted with openness and wisdom. In Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, Allah SWT emphasizes that humans were created into nations and tribes so that they may know one another. The concept of *ta'āruf* in the verse indicates that the main purpose of diversity is not to create division but to strengthen social relationships among human beings.

Ta'āruf does not only mean knowing someone's identity physically, but also understanding the values, cultures, and ways of life of other groups. Besides *ta'āruf*, the Qur'an also emphasizes the importance of tolerance or *tasāmuḥ* in social life. Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256 states that there is no compulsion in religion. This verse shows that Islam highly upholds individual freedom in choosing beliefs.

The Concept of Diversity in Hadith

The Hadith of Prophet Muhammad SAW provides practical explanations regarding the implementation of multicultural values in daily life. Rasulullah SAW was known as a figure who highly respected differences and upheld social justice. In one Hadith narrated by Tirmidhi, Rasulullah SAW encouraged Muslims to spread greetings, strengthen friendship, and build social relationships.

This Hadith shows that Islam strongly emphasizes the importance of harmonious social relations within diverse societies. The value of *tasāmuḥ* in Hadith can also be seen from the Prophet's attitude toward non-Muslims. In a Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud, Rasulullah SAW stated that anyone who harms peaceful non-Muslims will become his enemy on the Day of Judgment. This Hadith indicates that Islam strictly prohibits discriminatory acts and violence against other groups. This prophetic emphasis on protecting and respecting others is consistent with contemporary Islamic educational practice, since Muhajir et al., (2025) demonstrate that integrating such multicultural values into Islamic religious education can foster tolerance and inclusivity among students.

The Principle of 'Adl (Justice) as a Foundation of Multicultural Education

Alongside *ta'āruf* and *tasāmuḥ*, the Qur'an establishes 'adl as a binding obligation that applies irrespective of group membership. Surah al-Mā'idah verse 8 instructs believers to stand firmly for justice and warns that enmity toward a people must not lead them to act unjustly, while Surah al-Nisā' verse 135 requires justice to be upheld even against oneself or one's own kin. This universality is what makes 'adl indispensable to multicultural education. Whereas *ta'āruf* governs the encounter between groups and *tasāmuḥ* governs the disposition toward difference, 'adl governs the distribution of treatment, and therefore reaches the structural level at which schooling either reproduces or corrects inequality.

In educational terms, 'adl translates into requirements that are institutional rather than merely attitudinal: equitable access to learning resources for students of every background, assessment procedures that are

free from ethnic or sectarian bias, school regulations that do not privilege a dominant group, and the fair adjudication of conflict between students. These requirements correspond closely to what Banks, (2015) terms equity pedagogy and the empowering of school culture and social structure, and to what Sleeter & Grant, (2008) classify as the social-reconstructionist approach to multicultural education.

The convergence is significant: a value derived from the Qur'an and a category derived from contemporary educational theory identify the same site of intervention. This alignment is borne out empirically: in an Indonesian Islamic secondary school, Noe et al., (2026) found that the principle of 'adl (justice), together with wasāṭiyyah and rahmah, underpinned inclusive institutional policies promoting equity and participation rather than tolerant attitudes alone.

The Example of Prophet Muhammad SAW in a Multicultural Society

One of the clearest examples of the application of multicultural values in Islam is the Medina Charter. The charter was arranged by Rasulullah SAW as a mutual agreement among various groups in Medina consisting of Muslims, Jews, and other tribes. The Medina Charter contained principles of equal rights, religious freedom, social responsibility, and cooperation in maintaining public security. Through this charter, Rasulullah SAW succeeded in creating harmonious social life amidst a highly diverse society. Analysing the clauses of the Constitution of Medina, Embong et al., (2021) similarly conclude that the Prophet SAW achieved social cohesion in a plural society by recognising its diverse groups as a single ummah bound together by cooperative rights and shared responsibility.

The success of Rasulullah SAW in building the society of Medina shows that Islam possesses highly inclusive social concepts. The Prophet did not use differences as reasons to divide society but rather as foundations for strengthening unity and cooperation. Read analytically rather than only narratively, the Medina Charter is significant because it converted the values discussed above into enforceable institutional arrangements. Understood in this way, the charter functions in the present study not as a historical illustration but as evidence that Islamic normative sources are capable of generating structural, and not only attitudinal, responses to diversity the very capacity that Sachedina, (2001) identifies as the Islamic root of pluralism and that Hashim et al., (2015) locates in the Qur'anic principle of wasāṭiyyah.

Implementation of Multicultural Education in Islamic Education

The implementation of multicultural education in Islamic education requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Multicultural education cannot only be implemented through classroom theory but must also be realized in school culture, educational policies, and patterns of social interaction in learning environments. One important step in implementing multicultural education is the development of an inclusive curriculum.

The Islamic education curriculum needs to contain materials related to tolerance, respect for diversity, and universal humanitarian values. Teachers also play a very important role in multicultural education. Teachers must demonstrate tolerant attitudes and respect diversity in everyday interactions. Teachers' examples will have a greater influence than merely delivering theories in the classroom. The effectiveness of such comprehensive implementation is documented by Fahmi et al., (2025), who show that multicultural Islamic education combining an inclusive curriculum, cross-cultural learning, and the reinforcement of tolerance strengthens social cohesion within Islamic schools.

In the Indonesian setting these principles already have identifiable institutional carriers. The Merdeka Curriculum's Profil Pelajar Pancasila, whose dimensions include global diversity and faith in God together with noble character, supplies a formal opening through which multicultural content can enter Islamic school curricula; in the madrasah system the subject cluster of Akidah-Akhlak and Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam offers a natural site for teaching the Medina Charter as a model of plural coexistence.

At the level of learning method, pesantren traditions of *baḥṭh al-masā'il* and *munazarah*, in which contending juristic opinions are debated rather than suppressed, constitute an indigenous dialogic pedagogy that can be adapted for teaching about difference. Raihani, (2018) nevertheless cautions that such openings are frequently underused, since national policy expresses multicultural aims in general terms and leaves their translation to individual schools.

The empirical literature is consistent on where implementation succeeds or fails. Setyono & Widodo, (2019) show that teaching materials themselves may narrow the representation of diversity, which implies that curriculum content is a lever requiring deliberate design rather than assumed neutrality, which corresponds to the prejudice-reduction dimension in Banks, (2015); Gay, (2018) account of culturally responsive teaching, in which the teacher's own cultural stance is itself pedagogical.

Taken together, the four levers identified in the results curriculum content, learning method, school regulation and culture, and teacher exemplarity map onto the dimensions in Table 1 and provide a practicable agenda. What distinguishes the Islamic articulation of this agenda is not its content, which converges substantially with (Banks, 2015), Nieto, (1992), and the intercultural principles set out by Unesco, (2006), but its source of authority: for institutions and communities whose normative reference is the Qur'an and the Sunnah, grounding multicultural practice in ta'aruf, tasamuh, and 'adl renders it religiously obligatory rather than externally imposed. Kymlicka, (1995); Parekh, (2001) argue from political theory that stable multicultural arrangements require legitimating grounds internal to the communities concerned; the present analysis suggests that Islamic education in Indonesia possesses such grounds within its own sources.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that multicultural education from an Islamic perspective rests on the values of ta'aruf, tasamuh, and 'adl, through which Islam accepts diversity as sunnatullah to be met with openness, tolerance, and justice. The Medina Charter shows that these values can be institutionalized into equal rights, religious freedom, and social cooperation, converting attitude into enforceable arrangement.

What distinguishes this articulation is its source of authority: grounding multicultural practice in the Qur'an and Sunnah renders it religiously obligatory rather than externally imposed. The study is limited by its reliance on documentary sources and by the scarcity of empirical evidence on implementation in Indonesian Islamic institutions, where 'adl in particular remains underexamined.

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