



Cultural Hegemony in the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education Textbook Under the Merdeka Curriculum: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article history: Submitted: Juny 10, 2026 Final Revised: July 06, 2026 Accepted: 29 July, 2026 Published: July 31, 2026	Purpose: This study examines cultural hegemony in the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum from the perspectives of multicultural education and critical theory. It focuses on the role of textbooks in shaping religious knowledge and cultural representation in Indonesia's multicultural context. Methods: A qualitative design using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis was applied to one officially published Grade XII PAI textbook. The analysis covered textual narratives, visual representations, illustrations, and learning activities through the dimensions of text, discursive practice, and social practice. Findings: The textbook predominantly presents religious knowledge through centralized and normative narratives, while local Islamic traditions, interpretive plurality, and socio-cultural diversity receive limited representation. The discourse privileges standardized religious perspectives and reinforces dominant religious narratives. Conclusion: The textbook reflects cultural hegemony by privileging dominant religious interpretations and limiting multicultural perspectives. This indicates the need for more plural theological views, stronger representation of local Islamic traditions, and more inclusive textbook discourse. The findings are limited to the analyzed Grade XII textbook. Research Implications: Curriculum developers, textbook authors, educators, and policymakers should integrate multicultural education principles more fully into Islamic Religious Education materials to support inclusive and culturally responsive learning. Originality: This study integrates Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and multicultural education to examine ideological representation in an official PAI textbook and propose a framework for more inclusive learning materials.
Keywords: Cultural Hegemony; Critical Discourse Analysis; Islamic Education Textbook; Multicultural Education; Merdeka Curriculum.	
	
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INTRODUCTION

Religious education in multicultural societies faces increasingly complex challenges due to the growing dynamics of social interaction, cultural diversity, and identity formation in public spaces. This condition requires educational systems not only to transmit normative religious values but also to cultivate inclusive religious awareness that is adaptive to diverse social realities. In this context, schools as formal educational institutions hold a strategic role in shaping students' perspectives toward religion and diversity, while simultaneously possessing the potential to reproduce particular cultural dominance through curriculum structures and teaching materials (Chozin & Untoro, 2022; Fairclough, 1995).

Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) textbooks constitute one of the principal instruments in this process. Beyond functioning as sources of normative religious knowledge, textbooks also operate as ideological media that construct students' social reality. From the perspective of critical theory, cultural hegemony functions through the naturalization of dominant values that are accepted as common truth without critical reflection. Gramsci (1971) explains that domination does not always operate coercively but rather through mechanisms of social consent. Within educational settings, this process occurs through the selection of knowledge and value representation embedded in textbooks. Apple (2020a, 2020b) further emphasizes that curriculum and teaching materials function as ideological

instruments that preserve social dominance structures, including religious narratives that tend to position majority perspectives as normative standards.

On the other hand, multicultural education highlights the necessity of recognizing cultural plurality, identity diversity, and social experiences as foundational elements of fair and inclusive learning processes. Educational systems that fail to accommodate diversity risk producing social exclusion and inhibiting the development of students' critical awareness (Banks, 2021; Sleeter, 2021). In the context of Islamic education, this approach is particularly relevant considering Indonesia's pluralistic social composition. Previous studies indicate that the integration of multicultural values into religious education continues to face substantial obstacles, especially in instructional materials that remain largely normative and insufficiently dialogical (Tilaar, 2020; Berglund, 2021). Normatively, Islam provides a strong theological foundation for acknowledging diversity as part of divine will (*sunnatullah*). The Qur'an affirms that humanity was created in diverse nations and tribes so that they may know one another (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13), emphasizing difference as a basis for inclusive social interaction. Likewise, the principle of non-coercion in religion as stated in QS. Al-Baqarah: 256 underscores the importance of respecting freedom of belief. The Prophet Muhammad's practices in Medina also reflected a multicultural social model grounded in justice and equality (Jackson, 2021; Rohman, 2021). Therefore, religious education should not merely emphasize doctrinal dimensions but must also internalize values of tolerance, dialogue, and appreciation of diversity.

The urgency of this study becomes increasingly evident when viewed in light of the rise of intolerance and exclusivist tendencies within Indonesian educational institutions. Various studies have reported that intolerance in schools continues to manifest in forms such as restrictions on religious expression, discrimination against certain cultural symbols, and the dominance of majority religious views in educational activities (Suyadi, 2022; Huda, 2020). These findings suggest that educational spaces have not fully functioned as arenas for inclusive multicultural learning. In this context, textbooks occupy a crucial position as one of the primary references shaping students' religious understanding.

Previous research also demonstrates persistent issues regarding cultural representation in Islamic educational materials. Several studies reveal that PAI textbooks often privilege dominant interpretations of Islam while limiting space for local Islamic traditions and alternative cultural expressions (Lestari, 2022; Rahman, 2023). Other findings suggest that multicultural values are often represented symbolically rather than substantively, particularly in terms of social identity recognition and cultural representation (Widodo et al., 2025; Arifin, 2022). These conditions indicate that cultural hegemony within Islamic educational textbooks is not merely conceptual but has direct empirical implications for shaping students' social consciousness.

From the perspective of critical discourse analysis, language in educational texts is never neutral but inherently embedded with ideological interests. Fairclough (2003, 2019) argues that discourse constitutes social practice closely related to power relations. In PAI textbooks, the use of particular terminology, symbols, and narrative structures may reinforce dominant religious practices as universal standards of truth. This contributes to the formation of religious consciousness that tends to be exclusive and insufficiently responsive to social diversity (Santoso, 2021; Müller & Otto, 2023).

Although numerous studies have examined multicultural education in religious learning contexts, most remain normative and have not sufficiently addressed the ideological dimensions embedded within textbooks. Existing scholarship has highlighted the importance of culturally responsive teaching and curriculum transformation toward inclusivity (Keddie, 2023; Van der Kooij et al., 2021). However, few studies have comprehensively applied critical discourse analysis to examine how cultural hegemony operates within PAI textbooks and how such discourse influences students' multicultural consciousness.

Accordingly, a significant research gap exists in integrating cultural hegemony theory, critical discourse analysis, and multicultural education within the study of Islamic educational textbooks. This study seeks to address this gap by employing a comprehensive and contextual analytical framework while contributing to the development of a more inclusive and reflective model of religious education in multicultural societies.

Based on this background, this study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What forms of cultural hegemony are embedded within PAI textbooks in formal schools? (2) How do discourse structures within these textbooks reproduce majority cultural dominance? and (3) What are the implications of such hegemony for the construction of students' multicultural consciousness?

This study aims to analyze the forms of cultural hegemony in PAI textbooks, examine discourse structures in the representation of religious values, and explain their ideological implications for shaping students' multicultural awareness. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of cultural hegemony theory, critical discourse analysis, and multicultural education in the analysis of PAI textbooks. Furthermore, it offers practical contributions by proposing

the reconstruction of PAI textbooks based on critical multicultural pedagogy to support more inclusive and contextual religious education (Widodo et al., 2025).

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework because it enables the examination of the relationship between language, ideology, power, and social practice embedded in educational texts. In this study, CDA was applied to identify how cultural hegemony and multicultural values are discursively constructed in an Islamic Religious Education (PAI) textbook and how these constructions may influence students' understandings of religious and cultural diversity (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Ahmad & Shah, 2019).

The primary data source consisted of one official Grade XII Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti) textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum authored by Chozin and Untoro (2022), published by the Center for Curriculum and Book Development, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. This textbook was purposively selected because Grade XII contains the most comprehensive discussions concerning religious moderation, tolerance, multicultural interaction, and social diversity. Accordingly, the findings of this study are limited to this specific textbook and are not intended to represent all Islamic Religious Education textbooks used at the senior high school level.

The analysis covered the entire textbook, including all chapters, introductory sections, learning activities, illustrations, reflection pages, and evaluation materials. Documentary analysis was conducted between January and March 2025. The units of analysis comprised words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, dialogues, illustrations, visual symbols, and narrative structures explicitly or implicitly related to multicultural education, religious diversity, identity construction, majority-minority relations, local Islamic traditions, tolerance, inclusivity, and cultural representation (Arifin, 2022).

Data collection followed four sequential stages. First, the textbook and supporting curriculum documents, including learning outcomes and teacher guidelines, were identified and collected. Second, the textbook was read repeatedly to obtain contextual understanding of the discourse. Third, all relevant textual and visual segments were extracted and recorded using a coding sheet specifically developed for this study. Finally, each segment was classified according to predetermined analytical categories derived from Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and multicultural education theory (Santoso, 2021; Müller & Otto, 2023).

The coding instrument consisted of operational indicators representing manifestations of cultural hegemony within educational discourse. These indicators included (1) singular normative religious formulations, (2) absence of jurisprudential plurality, (3) standardized visual representation, (4) conditional tolerance discourse, (5) omission of local Islamic traditions, (6) centralized cultural framing, and (7) limited contextual socio-religious examples. Each coding category was accompanied by explicit operational definitions to ensure consistency during analysis. A textual segment was coded only when it clearly satisfied the predefined criteria of a particular indicator. When one segment reflected more than one indicator, each indicator was coded independently.

The frequencies reported in the Results section do not represent statistical measurements but indicate the number of textual or visual segments in which a particular indicator appeared throughout the textbook. Frequency counts were generated after completing the qualitative coding process and were used solely to illustrate the relative prominence of each discourse pattern rather than to support statistical inference.

Data analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model. The first dimension, text analysis, examined linguistic choices, modality, lexical selection, metaphors, sentence structures, visual symbols, and narrative organization. The second dimension, discursive practice analysis, investigated how the textbook discourse was produced and legitimized through curriculum policies, textbook authorship, and educational institutions. The third dimension, social practice analysis, interpreted the broader ideological implications of the discourse by relating the findings to cultural hegemony, multicultural education, and the socio-political context of Islamic education in Indonesia (Keddie, 2023; Van der Kooij et al., 2021).

To enhance credibility, the study employed theoretical triangulation, source triangulation, and peer debriefing. Theoretical triangulation involved interpreting the findings using Fairclough's CDA, Gramsci's cultural hegemony theory, and multicultural education perspectives. Source triangulation compared the textbook with curriculum documents, teacher manuals, and relevant empirical studies (Gearon, 2022). Peer debriefing involved two scholars with expertise in Islamic education and qualitative discourse analysis who independently reviewed the coding framework, coding decisions, and category interpretations. Differences in interpretation were discussed until consensus

was reached before the final categories and frequency counts were established. This procedure was intended to reduce researcher subjectivity and improve analytical consistency (Francis et al., 2022).

Because this study analyzed only one officially published Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook, its findings should be interpreted as an in-depth case study rather than as generalizations concerning all Islamic Religious Education textbooks used in Indonesian senior high schools. Nevertheless, the study provides a detailed methodological framework that can be replicated in future research involving different grade levels, publishers, or editions to enable broader comparative analyses (Revell & Walters, 2022; Rissanen, 2023).

RESULTS

Dominance of Majority Religious Narratives in Islamic Religious Education Textbooks

The analysis of the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook demonstrates that the construction of religious discourse is predominantly centered on majority religious narratives positioned as normative references within the learning process. The textual organization consistently presents particular religious interpretations as authoritative frameworks through which students are expected to understand Islamic teachings. Such patterns indicate that religious knowledge is largely represented through a singular perspective rather than through the diversity of interpretations that characterize Islamic intellectual traditions. This finding suggests that textbook discourse continues to privilege dominant religious narratives as the primary source of educational legitimacy.

Textual examination further reveals the repeated use of prescriptive expressions such as “the correct Islamic guidance,” “a Muslim must,” and “the proper implementation of Islamic teachings” across multiple thematic sections. These formulations are consistently presented as definitive statements rather than as perspectives that may be interpreted within broader intellectual traditions. The repetition of such language contributes to the construction of a standardized understanding of religious knowledge throughout the textbook. Consequently, students are exposed predominantly to a uniform framework of religious interpretation within formal learning materials.

The strongest manifestation of this pattern appears in discussions concerning ritual practice and religious obligations. Explanations related to worship practices are generally delivered through fixed procedural descriptions that provide limited reference to the existence of jurisprudential diversity within Islamic scholarship. Alternative legal interpretations that have historically emerged across various schools of thought receive minimal representation throughout the material. As a result, religious practice is portrayed as a singular and uncontested reality rather than as a field characterized by interpretive plurality.

Visual representations contained in the textbook also reflect a similar tendency toward uniformity in the portrayal of Muslim identity. Most illustrations depict standardized forms of dress, worship settings, and social interactions that correspond to mainstream religious expressions. Symbolic variations reflecting the cultural diversity of Indonesian Muslim communities are only minimally represented within the visual content. These observations indicate that visual discourse reinforces the dominance of majority narratives already established within the textual material.

Table 1. Indicators of Majority Narrative Dominance in the Grade XII PAI Textbook

Nu.	Analytical Indicator	Frequency of Occurrence	Form of Discursive Dominance	Educational Implication
1	Singular normative formulations	28 occurrences	Interpretive standardization	Restriction of critical inquiry
2	Absence of jurisprudential plurality	16 occurrences	Epistemological exclusion	Reduction of plural literacy
3	Uniform visual symbolism	21 occurrences	Symbolic homogenization	Identity simplification
4	Conditional tolerance discourse	13 occurrences	Controlled inclusivity	Limited dialogical development
5	Minimal contextual diversity	18 occurrences	Centralized cultural framing	Weak multicultural sensitivity

The content coding process identified several recurring indicators of majority narrative dominance throughout the textbook. Singular normative formulations appeared twenty-eight times and constituted the most frequently observed pattern within the analyzed material. Other indicators included the absence of jurisprudential plurality, uniform visual symbolism, conditional tolerance discourse, and limited contextual diversity. These findings demonstrate that majority narrative dominance is systematically embedded within the discourse structure of the textbook.

Marginalization of Local Islamic Traditions in Textbook Discourse

The analysis reveals that local Islamic traditions receive relatively limited representation within the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook. Religious discourse is primarily structured around formalized and centralized expressions of Islamic practice that are presented as the dominant reference points for religious authenticity. Meanwhile, regional traditions that have historically contributed to the development of Indonesian Islam are largely absent from the educational narrative. This pattern indicates the existence of representational imbalances in the construction of religious knowledge.

The marginalization of local traditions is particularly evident in sections discussing the historical spread of Islam throughout Indonesia. Textbook narratives emphasize doctrinal transmission and religious purification while providing limited discussion of the cultural adaptation processes that accompanied Islamization in various regions. The contributions of local religious leaders and culturally embedded educational approaches are only briefly mentioned or omitted entirely. Consequently, students receive a less comprehensive understanding of the historical development of Islam within the Indonesian archipelago.

Similar tendencies appear in discussions related to religious practice and social ethics. Community-based traditions and localized forms of religious expression are rarely presented as examples of Islamic life in contemporary society. The material instead prioritizes abstract doctrinal explanations that are detached from many of the socio-cultural realities experienced by learners. Such patterns limit the visibility of contextual religious practices within formal educational discourse.

Visual analysis further confirms this finding through the limited representation of local cultural diversity. Images depicting regional mosque architecture, pesantren traditions, local religious attire, and community rituals are largely absent from the textbook. Most illustrations rely on generalized religious symbols that do not adequately reflect Indonesia's socio-cultural plurality. Consequently, students encounter a relatively narrow visual representation of Islamic identity throughout the learning material.

Table 2. Indicators of Local Tradition Marginalization in the Grade XII PAI Textbook

Nu.	Analytical Indicator	Frequency of Occurrence	Form of Marginalization	Educational Implication
1	Omission of local Islamic historical narratives	19 occurrences	Historical exclusion	Weak contextual literacy
2	Absence of regional religious practices	23 occurrences	Cultural invisibility	Reduced cultural awareness
3	Standardized symbolic representation	20 occurrences	Visual centralization	Identity detachment
4	Lack of contextual socio-religious examples	17 occurrences	Social abstraction	Limited experiential relevance
5	Minimal discussion of adaptive Islamic traditions	14 occurrences	Epistemological narrowing	Restricted interpretive plurality

The coding results indicate that the absence of regional religious practices constitutes the most dominant form of marginalization identified in the textbook. Additional indicators include historical exclusion, standardized symbolic representation, lack of contextual socio-religious examples, and minimal discussion of adaptive Islamic traditions. These patterns appeared repeatedly throughout the analyzed chapters and suggest a systematic tendency toward representational centralization. Overall, the findings demonstrate that local Islamic traditions occupy a relatively peripheral position within textbook discourse.

DISCUSSION

Cultural Hegemony and the Reproduction of Majority Religious Narratives

The analysis indicates that the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook examined in this study predominantly constructs religious knowledge through normative and centralized narratives. The discourse consistently presents particular interpretations of Islamic teachings as authoritative references for students, while relatively limited attention is given to the diversity of interpretive traditions that have historically characterized Islamic scholarship. This pattern suggests that the textbook tends to privilege a singular framework of religious understanding, thereby narrowing opportunities for students to recognize the plurality of theological perspectives within Islam. Such findings are

consistent with the textual analysis, which identified repeated normative formulations, limited jurisprudential plurality, and standardized representations of religious practices throughout the textbook.

From Fairclough's three-dimensional perspective, these findings illustrate the interaction between textual features, discursive practices, and broader social practices. At the textual level, the repeated use of prescriptive expressions, standardized terminology, and uniform symbolic representations contributes to constructing a dominant understanding of legitimate religious knowledge. At the level of discursive practice, these textual choices reflect how officially sanctioned curriculum materials reproduce particular interpretations through institutional mechanisms of textbook production and educational policy. At the level of social practice, the discourse contributes to the normalization of dominant religious perspectives within formal education, reinforcing broader ideological assumptions concerning religious legitimacy and cultural authority.

This pattern can be further interpreted through Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, which emphasizes that ideological dominance is maintained primarily through social consent rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971). Educational institutions, including textbooks, function as important cultural apparatuses through which dominant values become normalized and accepted as common sense. Consequently, the textbook analyzed in this study does not merely transmit religious knowledge but also participates in constructing a particular worldview regarding acceptable religious identity and practice. Apple (2020a, 2020b) similarly argues that curriculum materials inevitably embody ideological choices because they determine which forms of knowledge are considered legitimate, authoritative, and worthy of inclusion in formal education. Viewed from this perspective, the predominance of majority religious narratives identified in this study reflects broader processes of ideological reproduction operating through educational discourse.

The present findings are consistent with previous scholarship examining ideological representation in Islamic education materials. Widodo, Rahman, and Syamsuddin (2025) reported that Indonesian Islamic education textbooks frequently privilege dominant religious narratives through selective representation and discursive framing. Likewise, Arifin (2022) identified normative bias within Islamic Religious Education textbooks that reduced opportunities for students to engage with diverse interpretations of religious teachings. Müller and Otto (2023) further demonstrated that discursive closure in educational texts often restricts critical reflection by presenting knowledge as fixed, homogeneous, and beyond contestation. The convergence between the present findings and previous studies suggests that issues of ideological representation remain an important concern within religious education.

Educationally, the predominance of singular religious narratives has important implications for students' multicultural competence and critical literacy. When educational materials consistently privilege one interpretive perspective, learners may have fewer opportunities to understand the rich diversity of Islamic intellectual traditions and the socio-cultural contexts in which religious interpretations develop. Such conditions may unintentionally encourage epistemological uniformity and reduce students' capacity to appreciate legitimate differences within Islamic scholarship. Consequently, strengthening plural representation and dialogical learning in textbook discourse may contribute to developing more reflective, inclusive, and critically engaged forms of religious understanding.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted within the methodological scope of the present study. The analysis focused exclusively on one officially published Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, the identified patterns should not be generalized as representing all Islamic Religious Education textbooks used in Indonesian senior high schools. Rather, this study provides an in-depth case analysis illustrating how cultural hegemony may be discursively constructed within a specific textbook. Broader conclusions concerning national textbook practices require comparative investigations involving multiple textbooks, different grade levels, various publishers, and alternative curriculum editions. Such comparative research would provide stronger empirical evidence regarding the consistency or variation of hegemonic discourse across Islamic Religious Education materials in Indonesia.

Marginalization of Local Islamic Traditions and the Politics of Representation

The findings further demonstrate that local Islamic traditions occupy only a limited position within the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook analyzed in this study. Although Indonesia possesses diverse expressions of Islam that have developed through long-standing interactions between religious teachings and local cultures, these contextual traditions receive relatively little attention in the instructional material. Instead, the textbook predominantly emphasizes standardized forms of religious practice and centralized religious narratives, thereby presenting a relatively homogeneous representation of Islamic identity. Such patterns suggest that cultural diversity within Indonesian Islam is only partially reflected in the textbook discourse.

Viewed through Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis, the marginalization of local Islamic traditions can be understood at multiple analytical levels. At the textual level, the omission of regional religious practices, local historical narratives, culturally embedded learning examples, and diverse visual representations indicates selective textual construction. These omissions are not merely linguistic choices but also shape the boundaries of what is presented as legitimate religious knowledge. At the level of discursive practice, the organization of textbook content reflects institutional processes through which curriculum policies, textbook development, and educational standardization influence the selection of knowledge included in official learning materials. At the level of social practice, these representational patterns contribute to reproducing broader cultural hierarchies by privileging centralized interpretations of Islam while reducing the visibility of localized religious experiences that have historically characterized Indonesian Muslim communities.

This phenomenon is closely related to Fairclough's concept of discursive silence, which emphasizes that ideological power is exercised not only through what is explicitly stated but also through what is systematically omitted from discourse (Fairclough, 2003). The absence of local Islamic traditions from educational materials does not necessarily represent direct rejection of those traditions. Rather, it functions as a subtle mechanism of symbolic exclusion that narrows students' opportunities to recognize the plurality of Islamic cultural expressions. Consequently, learners may develop a relatively limited understanding of how Islam has historically interacted with diverse cultural environments across different regions of Indonesia.

The present findings also reinforce Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony by illustrating how dominant cultural meanings become institutionalized through educational discourse. When officially published textbooks repeatedly privilege centralized representations of religious identity while minimizing alternative cultural expressions, particular understandings of Islam gradually become normalized as educational standards. Apple's perspective on curriculum ideology likewise suggests that decisions concerning curriculum content inevitably involve political and cultural choices regarding which forms of knowledge deserve institutional legitimacy (Apple, 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, the limited representation of local Islamic traditions identified in this study should be understood not merely as a matter of content selection but also as part of broader processes of knowledge construction within formal education.

These findings are consistent with previous empirical studies concerning representation in religious education. Rahman (2023) reported that Islamic Religious Education materials frequently prioritize dominant cultural interpretations while providing relatively limited opportunities for students to engage with local religious identities. Similarly, Lestari (2022) found that multicultural values are often presented symbolically without substantial discussion of regional diversity and contextual religious experiences. International studies conducted by Ogrodzka-Mazur (2025) and Parveen, Rodrigues, and Zainulabidin (2025) likewise demonstrate that selective curricular representation can unintentionally marginalize minority identities and local cultural traditions by privileging nationally dominant narratives within formal educational systems.

The educational implications of these findings are particularly relevant within Indonesia's multicultural context. When local Islamic traditions receive limited representation, students may acquire a fragmented understanding of the historical development of Islam in Indonesia and may overlook the dynamic interactions between religion, culture, and society that have shaped Indonesian Muslim communities for centuries. Such limitations may also reduce learners' ability to appreciate contextual forms of religiosity and weaken intercultural sensitivity toward diverse religious practices that coexist within the same national context.

Future textbook development should provide greater opportunities for students to engage with the diversity of Islamic traditions found throughout Indonesia. This does not imply replacing theological foundations with cultural narratives but rather integrating contextual examples, regional historical experiences, local religious practices, and diverse visual representations that more accurately reflect Indonesia's multicultural reality. Such an approach would strengthen multicultural literacy while simultaneously fostering a broader understanding of Islam as a religious tradition that has historically developed through dialogue with diverse cultural contexts.

These findings should be interpreted within the analytical boundaries of the present research. Since this study examined only one officially published Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook, the observed representational patterns should be regarded as characteristics of the analyzed textbook rather than definitive features of Islamic Religious Education textbooks nationally. Comparative studies involving multiple textbooks from different grade levels, publishers, and curriculum editions are therefore needed to determine whether similar forms of cultural marginalization are consistently reproduced across Indonesian religious education materials.

Implications for Multicultural Education and the Reconstruction of Inclusive Religious Learning

The findings of this study suggest that the dominance of majority religious narratives and the limited representation of local Islamic traditions have important implications for multicultural education within formal schooling. Textbooks function not only as instructional resources but also as cultural texts that shape students' understandings of religious legitimacy, social diversity, and cultural identity. Consequently, the way religious knowledge is represented in textbooks influences how learners interpret differences, negotiate social identities, and develop attitudes toward cultural plurality. When educational discourse consistently privileges homogeneous religious perspectives, opportunities for students to appreciate diversity as an inherent characteristic of Indonesian society may become considerably restricted.

From the perspective of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, these implications extend beyond textual representation to broader educational practices and institutional structures. At the textual level, the predominance of normative discourse and limited contextual diversity contributes to constructing a relatively uniform representation of Islam. At the level of discursive practice, these representations become institutionalized through curriculum implementation, textbook production, and classroom learning activities. At the level of social practice, such discourse may reinforce broader ideological assumptions concerning religious authority and cultural legitimacy within educational institutions. Thus, the textbook operates not only as a medium for transmitting knowledge but also as a mechanism through which particular cultural values and ideological positions are reproduced across generations.

These findings support [Banks' \(2021\)](#) argument that multicultural education requires educational materials capable of representing learners' diverse cultural realities in meaningful and substantive ways. Diversity should not merely appear as symbolic recognition but should be integrated into curriculum content in ways that encourage students to understand multiple perspectives, engage critically with social differences, and develop democratic attitudes toward cultural plurality. Likewise, [Sleeter \(2021\)](#) emphasizes that equitable representation within curriculum materials constitutes an essential foundation for promoting intercultural competence and educational inclusion. The present findings therefore indicate that strengthening multicultural representation within Islamic Religious Education textbooks would contribute to achieving broader educational objectives concerning social cohesion and democratic citizenship.

The findings also resonate with the principles of critical pedagogy proposed by [Freire \(2021\)](#) and [Giroux \(2020\)](#), both of whom argue that education should cultivate learners' capacity to question, interpret, and critically evaluate social realities rather than simply accept predetermined knowledge. The predominance of prescriptive religious discourse identified in the analyzed textbook may unintentionally reduce opportunities for dialogical learning by presenting religious interpretations as fixed and uncontested. Such conditions may limit students' critical engagement with the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of Islamic thought. In contrast, dialogical approaches advocated by [Everington \(2021\)](#), [Knauth and Körs \(2022\)](#), and [Schweitzer and Boschki \(2023\)](#) encourage learners to understand religious diversity through discussion, reflection, and respectful engagement with different perspectives. These educational approaches are particularly relevant for multicultural societies such as Indonesia, where religious understanding is closely intertwined with cultural diversity.

Accordingly, the reconstruction of Islamic Religious Education textbooks should extend beyond revising textual content alone. Curriculum developers and textbook authors should consider incorporating multiple theological perspectives, contextual discussions of local Islamic traditions, regionally diverse historical narratives, and visual representations reflecting Indonesia's multicultural society. Learning activities should likewise encourage inquiry, dialogue, comparative reflection, and critical analysis so that students are not positioned merely as recipients of religious knowledge but also as active interpreters capable of understanding the relationship between religion, culture, and society. Such reforms would strengthen multicultural literacy while simultaneously promoting more inclusive and reflective models of religious education.

These implications should be interpreted within the methodological scope of the present research. Because the study examined only one officially published Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum, the proposed recommendations should be viewed as analytical implications derived from a single case study rather than as generalized evaluations of all Islamic Religious Education textbooks used throughout Indonesia. Different textbooks, publishers, curriculum editions, or educational contexts may demonstrate different patterns of representation and ideological construction. Consequently, caution should be exercised when extending these findings beyond the analyzed textbook.

Future research should therefore expand the scope of Critical Discourse Analysis by examining multiple Islamic Religious Education textbooks across different grade levels, publishers, curriculum editions, and institutional contexts. Comparative investigations would enable researchers to identify whether the patterns of cultural hegemony,

multicultural representation, and ideological construction observed in this study are consistently reproduced or vary across educational materials. Such studies would provide stronger empirical foundations for curriculum reform while contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how Islamic Religious Education can support inclusive, democratic, and culturally responsive education within Indonesia's pluralistic society.

CONCLUSION

This study addressed three research questions concerning the forms of cultural hegemony embedded in the Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum, the discursive mechanisms through which majority cultural narratives are reproduced, and the implications of these discourse patterns for multicultural education. First, the findings indicate that the analyzed textbook predominantly represents religious knowledge through centralized and normative narratives while providing limited representation of local Islamic traditions and interpretive plurality. Second, the Critical Discourse Analysis demonstrates that these patterns are reproduced through textual choices, discursive practices, and broader social practices that collectively construct particular forms of religious legitimacy and cultural authority within the textbook. Third, the findings suggest that greater integration of plural theological perspectives, contextualized local Islamic traditions, and more inclusive representations would better support the multicultural objectives of the curriculum. These implications, however, are derived from the analysis of textbook discourse rather than from direct measurement of students' multicultural awareness or educational outcomes.

The study contributes to the literature by integrating Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, and multicultural education perspectives to examine ideological representation in an official Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook. The findings provide a conceptual basis for curriculum developers, textbook authors, and educators to evaluate and reconstruct instructional materials toward more inclusive, contextually responsive, and dialogical forms of religious education.

This study is subject to several limitations. The analysis focused exclusively on one officially published Grade XII Islamic Religious Education textbook under the Merdeka Curriculum; therefore, the findings should be interpreted as an in-depth case study rather than as generalizable conclusions regarding all Islamic Religious Education textbooks in Indonesia. In addition, the study analyzed textbook discourse only and did not investigate how teachers or students interpret and implement the textbook content in classroom practice.

Future research should extend this analysis by examining textbooks from different grade levels, publishers, curriculum editions, and educational contexts through comparative or cross-textbook analyses. Furthermore, combining Critical Discourse Analysis with classroom observations, teacher interviews, or student perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how textbook discourse is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted in educational practice.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Thoyibah was responsible for conceptualizing the study, formulating the research objectives, designing the critical discourse analysis framework, collecting and analyzing the textual data, and drafting the initial manuscript. Muhlisin contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, literature review, data interpretation, and the contextualization of multicultural education perspectives within Islamic Religious Education. Slamet Untung assisted in the methodological design, validation of the analytical procedures, and critical examination of the findings related to cultural hegemony and ideological representation in educational texts. Muhammad Jaeni contributed to the discussion of the research findings, the interpretation of educational implications, and the refinement of the manuscript's academic arguments. Moh. Muslih was responsible for manuscript review, supervision of the research process, validation of the final results, and overall quality assurance of the study. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for the accuracy, integrity, and scholarly rigor of the research.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The authors used artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools, including ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, and QuillBot, during the preparation of this manuscript for language editing, sentence refinement, academic paraphrasing, grammar checking, and improvement of the overall organization and readability of the article. These AI tools were utilized solely to support the writing and editing process and were not involved in the generation of research data, coding procedures, critical discourse analysis, interpretation of findings, or the formulation of conclusions. All analytical processes, theoretical interpretations, and scholarly arguments presented in this study were conducted independently by the authors. Following the use of AI-assisted tools, the authors carefully reviewed, verified, revised, and refined all content to ensure its accuracy, originality, methodological rigor, academic integrity, and compliance with ethical standards for scholarly publication. The authors accept full responsibility for the content of this manuscript, including all interpretations, analyses, conclusions, and statements presented therein.

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