

# Dialogical Approach: Strategies to Prevent Radicalism And Islamophobia in Schools Through Interreligious Dialogue

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## ABSTRACT

Radicalism and Islamophobia have increasingly become important issues within educational environments because both influence how students understand religious diversity and interact with individuals from different backgrounds. The absence of constructive social interaction, combined with strong environmental influence and uncontrolled exposure to digital information, often contributes to the development of prejudice from an early age. This research focuses on examining how dialogue-oriented learning can function as an educational strategy to minimize prejudice and strengthen tolerant attitudes among junior high school students. A qualitative case study design was employed to capture students' experiences and observe interaction patterns occurring in the school environment. Data were gathered through observation, interviews, and supporting documentation, then interpreted through an interactive qualitative analysis process. The findings reveal that students' perceptions toward religious differences are gradually shaped by family influence, digital media exposure, and limited opportunities for direct interaction with diverse groups. Classroom dialogue activities were found to encourage openness, improve empathy, and help students develop more inclusive perspectives toward diversity. The study highlights the importance of dialogue-based educational practices as an effective effort to reduce intolerance while strengthening multicultural awareness within schools.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, educational institutions have faced growing challenges related to how students understand social and religious differences. The spread of radical ideas together with negative perceptions toward particular religious groups increasingly influences the way young people interact with others. Schools are therefore not only responsible for academic development but also play an important role in helping students build healthy attitudes toward diversity. Both issues have become serious concerns because they significantly influence relationships among different religious and social groups, including within educational institutions. Radicalism generally refers to the development of rigid ideological beliefs that encourage exclusive attitudes and rejection toward people holding different social or religious identities. Within school environments, exposure to intolerant narratives may gradually shape the way students perceive differences and influence their patterns of social interaction in everyday life. (Sukri & Sazali, 2024). Within educational contexts, exposure to radical narratives may gradually shape students' perspectives toward diversity and influence how they interact with individuals from different religious backgrounds (Ningsih & Zalisman, 2024). Meanwhile, Islamophobia should not be understood merely as an individual feeling of fear or prejudice toward Muslims. In many cases, it also appears through wider forms of discrimination that influence how Muslim communities are represented, treated, and perceived within broader social structures. Such perceptions often emerge because of misinformation, limited interaction, and repeated exposure to biased narratives circulating in society. At the individual level,

Islamophobia can be understood as a form of prejudice manifested in fear, suspicion, hostility, and negative stereotypes directed toward Islam and Muslim communities. This perspective is closely related to Social Identity Theory, which explains that individuals naturally categorize themselves into social groups and tend to develop bias toward groups perceived as different from their own (Allen, 2020). Such prejudice frequently emerges due to limited direct interaction, misinformation, and repeated exposure to biased narratives circulating in digital spaces (Rohmah & Irawan, 2026). However, Islamophobia does not solely operate as individual prejudice. At a broader level, Islamophobia may also manifest as structural discrimination, referring to systemic forms of exclusion embedded within institutions and social structures, including discriminatory policies, unequal treatment, marginalization of Muslim identities, and biased representations reproduced through media and public discourse (Ponce, 2025). This perspective is further supported by Edward Said's theory of Orientalism, which explains how historical representations of Islam have often been constructed through narratives that portray Muslim communities as inferior, threatening, and fundamentally incompatible with modern society (Gürbüz-Blaich, 2025). Therefore, Islamophobia should not only be understood as an issue of personal perception but also as a systemic mechanism capable of reproducing inequality and sustaining intolerance within society.

As formal educational institutions, schools play a crucial role in shaping students' perspectives regarding diversity and coexistence within multicultural societies. Nevertheless, the expansion of digital technology has created new challenges, as students increasingly encounter unverified information, provocative narratives, hate speech, and exclusive religious discourses circulating online. Studies show that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to internalizing intolerant narratives when they lack critical thinking skills and opportunities for constructive intercultural interaction (Suryani dkk., 2024). In this context, Gordon Allport's Contact Hypothesis suggests that prejudice can be reduced when individuals engage in meaningful interaction under conditions of equality and mutual respect (Joseph, 2022). Under these circumstances, radicalism and Islamophobia can no longer be understood solely as broader societal issues, but have become pressing challenges within educational environments that require serious preventive educational strategies. Conceptually, the emergence of prejudice against other groups can be explained through the Social Identity Theory developed by Henri Tajfel. This theory explains that individuals naturally construct identities based on the social groups they belong to, then tend to compare their group with other groups. When group identity is overly understood, individuals will more easily develop stereotypes, social biases, and even prejudice against groups outside their own. In the context of students, the adolescent development phase is a time when social identity formation occurs intensively, so the family environment, social interactions, and digital media significantly influence how they view different groups. (Tajfel dkk., 2001) If this process takes place without education that instills an open attitude, then the potential for intolerance to develop from school age becomes even greater. To address these issues, education requires strategies that not only emphasize cognitive aspects but also foster healthy social interactions among students. One relevant approach is the dialogical approach. This approach places open communication, respect for differences, equality, and the ability to understand others' perspectives at the heart of the interaction process. This idea is related to the Contact Hypothesis theory developed by Gordon Allport, which explains that positive interactions between diverse groups can help reduce social prejudice and foster acceptance of diversity. (Dovidio dkk., 2008) In educational practice, dialogue is an important medium for bringing students together in a communication space that allows for the exchange of experiences, understanding, and shared reflection on the differences they have.

Previous studies have shown that intergroup dialogue significantly contributes to building more inclusive social attitudes. Research by Biren A. Nagda explains that the intergroup dialogue model can increase empathy, strengthen active listening skills, and reduce the tendency for bias

against other groups. (B. R. Nagda, 2007) Research conducted by Mambaul Ngadhimah also shows that the practice of dialogue in a multicultural society is able to encourage the formation of an attitude of religious moderation and strengthen social relations between groups with different backgrounds. (Ngadhimah dkk., 2025) In addition, research on the development of Islamophobia in Indonesia confirms that digital media has a large role in shaping negative public perceptions of certain religious groups through the dissemination of biased and disproportionate information. (Nurchasanah & Basit, 2025). Although considerable research has been conducted on radicalism, religious tolerance, and intergroup relations, most previous studies have focused on the general public, social communities, and university environments. Research specifically examining the application of a dialogic approach as a preventive strategy to reduce interfaith prejudice and prevent the development of radicalism and Islamophobia in junior high schools remains scarce. This situation indicates a gap in previous research that is important for further study, particularly regarding the implementation of dialogic education for early adolescent students as an effort to prevent religious intolerance. Empirically, junior high school students are in a phase of social development that is heavily influenced by their surroundings and increasingly consumes digital information in their daily lives. In this context, limited open communication regarding religious diversity within the school environment can lead students to develop narrow understandings of other groups without experiencing healthy interactions. This situation has the potential to give rise to prejudice, stereotypes, and even exclusive attitudes that, in the long term, can develop into intolerant tendencies. Therefore, schools need educational strategies that can create more inclusive interactions so that students can develop a more mature and critical understanding of diversity. Based on this description, the main question in this research focuses on how a dialogic approach can be implemented as an educational strategy to reduce interfaith prejudice while preventing the development of radicalism and Islamophobia in the school environment. This study aims to analyze the implementation of a dialogic approach in building inclusive communication among students and identify its contribution to the formation of attitudes of tolerance, social empathy, and religious moderation in school life

## 2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative case study design because the research focused on understanding students' experiences and examining social interactions occurring naturally within the school environment. The approach was considered suitable since the study attempted to capture how prejudice related to religious diversity develops and how dialogue-based learning can contribute to preventing intolerant attitudes among adolescents. The qualitative method was considered appropriate because this study sought to explore social realities by focusing on participants' experiences, interactions, and interpretations that emerge naturally within educational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study was carried out at a public junior high school in East Java, Indonesia. The selection of this research site was based on the consideration that the school represents a socially diverse educational environment where students come from different religious and socio-cultural backgrounds, creating opportunities for daily interaction among individuals with varying identities. The school was specifically chosen for several reasons. First, students at the junior high school level are generally in an important developmental stage in which social identity and attitudes toward diversity begin to develop more intensively. Second, the heterogeneity of student backgrounds provides an appropriate context for observing patterns of intergroup interaction. Third, adolescents' increasing exposure to digital media creates a social environment in which narratives containing intolerance or prejudice may influence students' perceptions toward religious differences (Yin, 2018). The participants involved in this study consisted of students, teachers, and school staff who actively participate in learning activities as well as daily social interaction within the school

environment. Students were selected as the main participants because they are directly involved in the process of identity formation and social interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds. Teachers and school staff were included as supporting informants to provide broader perspectives regarding school culture, patterns of interaction, and institutional efforts to foster tolerance among students (Patton, 2002).

Table 1. Distribution of Research Informants

No	Category of Informants	Number of Participants	Criteria of Selection
1	Students	12 Participants	Students from diverse religious backgrounds
2	Teachers	3 Participants	Teachers involved in character education
3	School Staff	2 Participants	Staff involved in student affairs
<b>Total</b>		<b>17 Participants</b>	

To obtain comprehensive information, data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews with participants, and supporting school documents related to educational activities. These different sources allowed the researcher to examine both students' experiences and institutional efforts in promoting tolerance within everyday school interactions. Observation techniques were used to identify patterns of student interaction occurring during everyday school activities. Interviews were conducted to explore participants' perspectives, experiences, and responses regarding diversity, interreligious interaction, and the formation of prejudice. Meanwhile, documentation was used to support empirical findings related to school programs, institutional policies, and educational activities associated with multicultural interaction practices (Flick, 2022).

Table 2. Interview Guidelines

No	Informants	Interview Focus	Guiding Questions
1	Students	Understanding diversity	How do you perceive religious diversity at school?
2	Students	Social interaction	Have you experienced difficulty interacting with students from different religions?
3	Teachers	School strategies	What strategies are used to promote tolerance?
4	School Staff	Institutional culture	What school programs support multicultural interaction?

To maintain the trustworthiness of the findings, this research employed both source triangulation and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from different participants as well as multiple data collection techniques. In addition, member checking was conducted to ensure that participants' statements and experiences had been interpreted accurately by the researcher. The data analysis process followed the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and continuous conclusion drawing throughout the research process until a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon was obtained (Miles dkk., 2014).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### RESULTS

The data collected throughout this research show that attitudes related to prejudice toward religious differences among junior high school students are shaped through a series of social experiences that emerge from both personal environments and broader social interaction. Analysis of interview transcripts, classroom observation, and supporting documentation identified four central

findings, namely the influence of family in shaping early perceptions, the contribution of digital media in constructing stereotypes, limited patterns of interaction among students from different backgrounds, and the implementation of dialogue-oriented learning as an educational effort to strengthen tolerance.

Table 3. Summary of Research Findings

Main Theme	Main Findings	Data Source	Participants
Family influence	Family conversations shape students' early assumptions toward others	Interview	Student 1, Student 2, Teacher 1
Digital media exposure	Online narratives repeatedly reinforce stereotypes	Interview	Student 4, Student 5, Teacher 2
Social interaction patterns	Friendship networks tend to remain homogeneous	Observation & Interview	Student 6, School Staff
Dialogical learning	Dialogue activities encourage openness and empathy	Interview	Students, Teachers, Vice Principal

### Family Environment and the Formation of Students' Initial Perceptions

Interview data revealed that family environments become one of the earliest spaces where students begin constructing perceptions regarding individuals from different religious communities. Repeated conversations taking place at home appeared to influence the way students develop comfort, trust, and attitudes when engaging with others. One participant explained: *"At home, I often hear family members talking about certain groups in ways that make me feel more comfortable staying close to friends who have similar beliefs to mine."* (Student 1). A similar experience was described by another student, who stated: *"Sometimes opinions expressed by family members affect the way I think about other people, even before I personally know them."* (Student 2). Teachers participating in the study also recognized similar patterns within classroom interaction. According to one teacher, assumptions formed before students enter school frequently influence their social behavior during daily learning activities. *"We sometimes observe students showing hesitation when interacting with classmates from different religious backgrounds because certain perceptions have already developed before they come to school."* (Teacher 1)

### Digital Media Exposure and the Reinforcement of Religious Stereotypes

Another important finding emerging from this study concerns the increasingly significant role of digital media in influencing students' perspectives toward diversity. Several students admitted that online platforms frequently expose them to information portraying certain groups negatively, which gradually shapes their social perceptions over time. One participant explained: *"I often come across content on social media that talks negatively about certain groups, and after seeing similar things repeatedly, sometimes it begins influencing how I think without me realizing it."* (Student 4). Another student described a comparable experience: *"There are videos online that present certain groups as dangerous, and after repeatedly seeing those discussions, my perception slowly changes."* (Student 5). Teachers interviewed during the research also acknowledged the strong influence of digital environments on students' perspectives. *"A lot of opinions students bring into classroom discussions are not based on direct experience, but rather on narratives they continuously encounter on social media platforms."* (Teacher 2). The vice principal similarly emphasized that adolescents often access large amounts of online information without sufficiently evaluating the credibility of the content, making them vulnerable to misinformation and stereotype formation (Wachs dkk., 2023).

### Limited Social Interaction and the Persistence of Social Distance

Observation conducted during school activities showed that students generally establish closer relationships with peers who share similar religious and social backgrounds. Although no direct

conflict was identified during observation, interaction across different groups appeared relatively limited and less intensive. One student explained: *"I usually spend more time with friends who have similar beliefs because communication feels easier and there is already a sense of familiarity."* (Student 6). Patterns observed during classroom and non-classroom activities showed similar tendencies, where friendship groups were largely formed around similarity of identity rather than broader interaction across differences. School staff participating in the research also confirmed this tendency. *"Most students naturally build closer friendships with people they feel familiar with, and usually those friendships develop among students who share similar backgrounds."* (School Staff 1) (Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

### **Dialogical Learning and the Development of More Inclusive Attitudes**

The implementation of dialogue-centered learning activities produced observable changes in the way students responded to discussions related to diversity. At the beginning of the learning process, several students expressed discomfort when discussing issues associated with religious difference because such conversations were considered sensitive. One participant stated: *"At first I felt uncomfortable talking about religious differences because I was worried that misunderstanding could happen during discussion."* (Student 8). After participating in repeated dialogue sessions, students gradually became more willing to listen to perspectives different from their own experiences and beliefs. Another student explained: *"After joining several discussion sessions, I began understanding that listening to different experiences helps me realize that differences do not automatically create conflict."* (Student 9). Teachers involved in dialogue-based learning also observed noticeable behavioral changes among students. *"Students became more open when discussing sensitive issues and showed greater willingness to respect opinions different from their own perspective."* (Teacher 3). The vice principal further explained that students increasingly demonstrated stronger cooperation and more positive interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds during both classroom learning and extracurricular activities (B. (Ratnesh) A. Nagda & Gurin, 2007).

### **DISCUSSION**

The overall findings illustrate that prejudice among adolescents develops through continuous social experiences rather than appearing spontaneously. The influence of family environments identified in this research suggests that students frequently internalize assumptions regarding social difference long before establishing direct relationships with individuals outside their immediate social group. Recent studies on educational intervention and prejudice formation similarly emphasize that social environments function as important spaces through which attitudes regarding difference are gradually transmitted and normalized (Saada, 2024). One important aspect identified during the research concerns the growing influence of digital platforms in shaping adolescents' understanding of religious diversity. Students today spend considerable time consuming online information, and repeated exposure to certain narratives gradually affects the way they build perceptions about groups that are different from their own social identity. When critical media literacy remains limited, such exposure may contribute to the formation of stereotypes and prejudice. Continuous exposure to digital narratives containing stereotypes, misinformation, or hostile representations may gradually influence attitudes when individuals lack sufficient media literacy skills. Current research consistently demonstrates that repeated exposure to online hate-based content contributes significantly to the normalization of exclusionary attitudes among young people (Sukmana dkk., 2025). The study also shows that limited opportunities for direct interaction among students from different backgrounds often maintain social distance between groups. When communication across differences rarely occurs, assumptions formed through indirect experience tend to remain unchallenged and may gradually develop into exclusionary attitudes. When opportunities for

meaningful communication remain limited, assumptions and stereotypes often remain unchallenged. Previous empirical studies similarly show that sustained interaction between social groups creates opportunities for individuals to re-evaluate assumptions previously formed through indirect experience (Wenzing dkk., 2024). The implementation of dialogue-oriented learning in this study demonstrates that structured educational communication creates meaningful opportunities for reducing prejudice while strengthening empathy and mutual understanding among students. The gradual behavioral changes observed throughout the research indicate that schools function not only as spaces for knowledge transmission, but also as important social environments where inclusive values may be cultivated intentionally through educational practice. Recent studies in tolerance education further confirm that schools play an essential role in preventing exclusionary attitudes, strengthening multicultural awareness, and minimizing the development of intolerance among adolescents living within diverse social environments (La Barbera, 2015).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings obtained throughout the research process, prejudice among adolescents does not emerge instantly but develops gradually through continuous influence from family environments, digital information, and patterns of social interaction experienced in daily life. The research also demonstrates that schools function not only as academic institutions but as important social environments where inclusive attitudes can be intentionally cultivated. Dialogue-based learning was found to create healthier communication patterns among students, encourage empathy, and strengthen respect toward religious diversity. For this reason, educational practices that emphasize open dialogue offer meaningful potential for preventing intolerance, minimizing prejudice, and building stronger multicultural awareness among students living within increasingly diverse societies.

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