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Enhancing Religious Literacy for the Promotion of Tolerance: A Design-Based Approach to Developing an Islamic Education **Model in Higher Education**

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Abstract

This study addresses the problem of low religious literacy and tolerance among university students in West Java, Indonesia. Misunderstandings of key Islamic terms such as kafir and bid'ah, narrow fiqh-centered interpretations, and reliance on unverified digital sources have limited students' understanding of religious diversity and hindered interfaith harmony. Using a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach, the study began with a needs analysis involving 516 students and five lecturers from four universities, which revealed critical gaps in knowledge and attitudes. Based on these findings, the FAITH learning model—an acronym for Fostering Awareness, Inquiry, Thinking, and Harmonywas designed to integrate AI-assisted chatbot interaction, structured reflection, and collaborative learning rooted in real-life diversity. The model was subsequently tested in two phases: an initial pilot with 44 students and a revised implementation with 48 students. Quantitative analysis showed statistically significant improvements in religious literacy (N-Gain = 0.7458) and tolerance attitudes (N-Gain = 0.6525), with p-values < 0.01. These results demonstrate that the FAITH model is pedagogically effective and socially inclusive. The study's original contribution lies in the development of a contextual religious education model that combines digital inquiry tools with pluralistic learning to cultivate students who are not only knowledgeable but also tolerant, critical, and adaptive in diverse societies.

Keywords: Design Based Research, Islamic Religious Education, Learning Model, Religious Literacy, Tolerance.

Introduction

Religions have historically played a significant role in promoting literacy within various religious education systems (1). However, this role is being increasingly challenged by the rise of religious diversity, in which religious education often encounters competing claims of exclusive truth (2). These truth claims, when practiced rigidly, tend to negate alternative perspectives and may generate social tensions, intergroup conflicts, discrimination, and stereotypes in multi-religious societies (3-5). To prevent these tensions, fostering an attitude of tolerance is essential for achieving harmonious interfaith relationships (6). Tolerance, however, cannot thrive in the absence of understanding. Inaccurate knowledge or misconceptions about religious diversity form significant barriers to its development. These conditions reveal a critical link between literacy competence, especially religious literacy, and tolerance. Studies argue that tolerant behavior can only flourish in a literate society (7, 8). Therefore, enhancing literacy through education, particularly via instructional designs that explicitly aim to develop tolerance, becomes a strategic necessity. The concept of literacy, though widely debated, occupies an increasingly central position in educational research (9, 10). All school curricula are based on implicit or explicit literacy models expectations about how students should read, write, think, and communicate within disciplinary boundaries (9). In religious education, the term religious literacy emerged in the 1990s to describe the skills needed to interpret and engage with religious ideas (11). Religious literacy includes the capacity to reflect, communicate, and act knowledgeably and respectfully toward religious phenomena (12), and to analyze the complex intersections of religion with social, political, and

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cultural dynamics (13, 14). Several definitions have been proposed. Prothero defines religious literacy as the ability to understand and apply fundamental elements of religious traditions, such symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives. His framework further divides religious literacy into ritual, confessional, and denominational dimensions (15). Meanwhile, Richardson frames religious literacy as a form of moral and civic kindness that equips individuals to make informed choices and cultivate respect and tolerance for others (16). Recognizing the prevalence of religious illiteracy, many scholars advocate for dedicated religious literacy courses in schools and universities to help students navigate the complexities of religious and cultural diversity (14). Such education is seen as vital in developing tolerant dispositions and promoting social harmony. Tolerance itself is a contested term, especially when combined with "religious," as it often implies accepting beliefs or practices one disagrees with (17, 18). Nonetheless, religious tolerance is generally understood as mutual acceptance among individuals of differing faiths or cultural backgrounds, aiming at peaceful coexistence and shared values such as justice and equality (19). This vision is strongly aligned with the principles of peace education, which emphasizes the cultivation of empathy, nonviolence, and constructive dialogue as educational goals (20). Such efforts are also evident in faithbased peace initiatives conducted in places of worship, where religious leaders facilitate interfaith dialogues and communal reconciliation projects (21). Moreover, in multicultural societies, religious tolerance cannot be separated from the broader aims of multicultural education, which seeks to foster respect for diversity, critical consciousness, and equitable participation across cultural and religious boundaries (22). The United Nations frameworks support this interpretation: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [Article 18(4)] and the Convention on the Rights of the Child [Article 29(4)] emphasize educational approaches that promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship across cultural and religious lines. These instruments highlight education's critical role in instilling inclusive values (23). The UN Declaration of Human Rights [Article 1] further underscores the

imperative for individuals to act in a spirit of brotherhood, reinforcing the role of education in cultivating a culture of tolerance. In response, scholars such as Carr propose a model of religious education that strengthens religious literacy to enable pluralistic understanding and prepare students to live responsibly in diverse societies (24). This pedagogical approach is further supported by frameworks in religious pedagogy, which advocate dialogical, reflective, and contextsensitive methods of teaching religion to promote not only understanding but also ethical and civic engagement. Integrating these perspectives into religious education makes it possible to develop students who are literate and peace-oriented, capable of contributing meaningfully to a pluralistic and harmonious society (25). Several empirical studies support this direction. A past study explored adolescents' experiences in religious education through classroom observations and interviews. Their findings suggest that religious learning environments contribute to tolerance when students engage in reflective meaning-making (1). Seiple and Hoover, proposed a cross-cultural religious literacy method that teaches both individual and comparative competencies, emphasizing collaborative interaction and mutual understanding as key components (26). Byrne examined how religious education governance in state schools influences cultural inclusion and tolerance. By analyzing active and passive inclusion strategies, the study showed how these approaches affect minority representation and democratic engagement in religiously plural education systems (27). In contrast to these prior works-which often remain theoretical or qualitative—this research seeks to develop and test a pedagogical framework for Islamic Religious Education (IRE) that can effectively foster religious literacy and, in turn, promote students' religious tolerance. This study focuses on finding an instructional model that integrates literacy and mutually tolerance as reinforcing Accordingly, the central research question addressed is: How can a learning model in Islamic Religious Education foster students' attitudes of religious tolerance?. This study offers a valuable contribution by mapping students' current religious literacy levels, analyzing the relationship between literacy and tolerance, and designing a

learning model grounded in empirical data that can be practically implemented in higher education settings to foster inclusive, tolerant mindsets.

Methodology

Design and Research Procedure

This study applied a Design-Based Research (DBR) approach over 24 months to strengthen religious literacy through iterative design in real educational settings (28, 29). DBR emphasizes practical interventions, collaboration with

practitioners, and developing context-based design principles to improve learning outcomes (29, 30). The process included three main phases: (1) Design Phase—using surveys and FGDs to draft the initial model; (2) Analysis Phase—involving participant recruitment and a small-scale trial; and (3) the Cyclic Redesign Phase—where the model was refined repeatedly until it reached the desired effectiveness (26, 27). The complete process is shown in Figure 1.

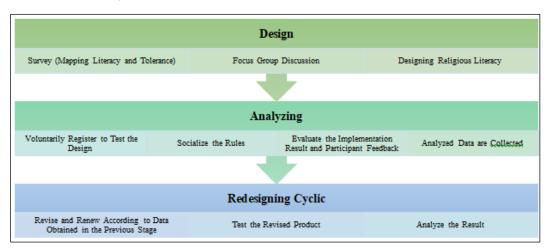


Figure 1: Phase of Design Based Research

Based on Figure 1, the Design-Based Research (DBR) process in this study consisted of three major phases:

Design Phase

A quantitative needs analysis was conducted through surveys administered to a number of students from several public non-religious universities in West Java Province. The instrument measured students' baseline levels of religious literacy and tolerance. This survey was complemented by Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with several Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lecturers to explore deeper insights into students' misconceptions and the pedagogical challenges they face. The findings from both methods were integrated to construct the initial prototype of the instructional model.

Analysis Phase

A small-scale pilot trial was conducted involving a group of students who participated in learning sessions using the prototype instructional model. Two primary instruments were used in this phase: a Religious Literacy Scale (consisting of 23 Guttman-scaled items) and a Religious Tolerance Attitude Scale (consisting of 20 Likert-scaled

statements). The instruments underwent a validation process that included expert review, pilot testing with voluntary students' participant, and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. Pretest and post-test data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, N-Gain analysis, and the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test.

Redesign Cyclic Phase

Based on feedback from participants and the statistical results of the first trial, the instructional model was revised and improved. The revised model was then re-tested with another group of students. The outcomes were subsequently analyzed to evaluate the model's effectiveness and its alignment with the intended learning objectives.

Participant and Research Site

This study involved 516 Muslim students (228 males, 288 females) from four public non-religious universities in West Java Province, Indonesia. All participants had completed the Islamic Education course, which is mandatory under Indonesia's national higher education policy. In this system, students take religious education according to their faith, so Islamic Education is offered

specifically to Muslim students. The implementation of the model took place at one of the top public universities in West Java.

Research Instrument

This study employed two main instruments: a religious literacy instrument and a religious tolerance attitude instrument. The religious literacy instrument consists of 23 Guttman-scale items (1 = No, 2 = Yes), covering three dimensions: Religious Data Literacy (ability to identify information on religions and Islamic schools of thought in Indonesia), Religious Information Technology Literacy (ability to utilize digital tools for accessing and understanding religious content), and Religious Humanity Literacy (positive attitudes toward religious diversity and collaboration across sects). The religious tolerance attitude instrument includes 20 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with five indicators: Acceptance (acknowledging others' religious rights and values), Respect (toward religious symbols and followers of other faiths), Appreciation (support for others' religious moments), Openness (willingness to learn about diversity), and Peace-Oriented (promoting harmony and interfaith care). Both

instruments were designed to comprehensively, validly, and reliably measure the participants' level of religious literacy and tolerance.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Instrument validation was conducted through expert review and empirical testing. Three experts confirmed the content, indicators, and clarity with minor revisions. Testing with 50 participants showed all items exceeded the *r*-table value (0.279), confirming construct validity. Cronbach's Alpha scores were 0.844 (religious literacy) and 0.935 (religious tolerance), indicating high reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through surveys and in-depth interviews. The survey captured quantitative data on religious literacy and tolerance, while interviews provided qualitative insights to refine learning activities. Due to non-normal data distribution, non-parametric analyses were used, including descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank correlation, and N-Gain analysis to assess intervention effectiveness. All analyses were performed using SPSS. Reference value ranges were applied to interpret literacy and tolerance levels, correlation strength, and N-Gain scores, as shown in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Table 1: Reference Values for Literacy and Tolerance Levels

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Value of Literacy In	terpretation	Value of Tolerand	Value of Tolerance Interpretation						
Mean Score	Category	Mean Score	Category						
1.81-2.00	Extremely Literate	4.21-5.00	Very Tolerant						
1.61-1.80	Literate	3.41-4.20	Tolerant						
1.41-1.60	Well-Literate	2.61-3.40	Well Tolerant						
1.21-1.40	Slightly Literate	1.81-2.60	Slightly Tolerant						
1.00-1.20	Less Literate	1.00-1.80	Intolerant						

Table 2: Degree of Relationship (31)

Correlation Coefficient	Category
0.00-019	Poor
0.20-0.39	Weak
0.40-0.59	Sufficient
0.60-0.79	High
0.80>	Very High

Table 3: N-Gain Value Reference Table (32, 33)

Score Category		Effectiveness Category		
Value	Criteria	Value	Interpretation	
g>0.7	High	<40%	Ineffective	
0.3 <u><</u> <i>g</i> ≤07	Medium	40-55%	Less effective	
g<0.3	Low	56-75%	Fairly effective	
		>76%	Effective	

In addition, the qualitative data collected from interviews were analyzed using thematic coding with the assistance of NVivo 12 Plus, allowing researchers to identify emergent themes, contextual insights, and participant perspectives that informed and enriched the interpretation of quantitative findings.

Results

Quantitative Needs Analysis of Students' Initial Profile in Literacy and Tolerance

In the initial Design Phase of this Design-Based Research (DBR), a descriptive analysis was conducted on two key variables: religious literacy and religious tolerance. Religious literacy was

assessed using a Guttman scale, while religious tolerance used a 5-point Likert scale. Data were obtained from 516 students across four universities through survey distribution. The interpretation of mean scores followed the classification criteria outlined in Tables 1.

Profile of Students' Religious Literacy

Religious literacy in this study includes three core dimensions: religious data literacy, religious information technology literacy, and religious humanitarian literacy. These reflect students' abilities to understand Islamic information, use digital religious resources, and show awareness of social diversity. The descriptive results of students' religious literacy profiles are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Religious Literacy Profile

Variable Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean Interpretation	Std. Deviation
Religious Data Literacy	516	1.00	1.63	1.28 Slightly Literate	0.21981
Religious Information Technology Literacy	516	1.00	1.75	1.33 Slightly Literate	0.22000
Religious Humanitarian Literacy	516	1.00	1.86	1.22 Slightly Literate	0.14875
Average Religious Literacy Score	!			1.27 Slightly Literate	

The table above (Table 4) shows that all dimensions of religious literacy have an average score of less than 1.40, which falls into the *Slightly Literate* category. The relatively small standard deviations indicate that students' perceptions of religious literacy are fairly homogeneous. The low score in Religious Humanitarian Literacy (Mean = 1.22; SD = 0.14875) reflects students' weak responses in building empathy and interfaith collaboration.

Profile of Students' Religious Tolerance Attitudes

Students' religious tolerance attitudes were assessed using five indicators: acceptance, respect, appreciation, openness, and peace-oriented behavior. These indicators reflect students' willingness to embrace religious differences, respect other faiths, and promote peaceful interfaith relations. Descriptive analysis results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of Students' Religious Tolerance Profile

Variable	Dimension	N	Min	Max	Mean	Interpretation Std. Deviation
	Acceptance	516	1.25	3.50	2.13	Slightly Tolerant 0.42680
Daliaiassa	Respect	516	1.25	3.50	2.17	Slightly Tolerant 0.41410
Religious Tolerance	Appreciation	516	1.25	3.75	2.45	Well Tolerant 0.43017
Tolerance	Openness	516	1.00	4.00	2.36	Well Tolerant 0.65284
	Peace-Oriented	516	1.17	3.83	2.47	Well Tolerant 0.48542
Overall Average			2.31	Slightly Tolerant		

Table 5 shows that students' overall religious tolerance attitudes fall into the *Slightly Tolerant* category. The greatest variation appears in the *Openness* indicator (SD = 0.65284), indicating diverse views on religious diversity, while

Acceptance and Respect show more consistent, but generally low, readiness to accept differing beliefs. Overall, students exhibit relatively low levels of both religious literacy and tolerance, with homogeneous perceptions in literacy but more

variability in tolerance dimensions. These findings highlight the need for a learning model that simultaneously develops religious understanding and promotes affective values of tolerance. Reflective methods, dialogical learning, and context-based technology integration are proposed as strategic interventions. Given these findings, it is crucial to examine whether religious

literacy correlates with tolerance attitudes. Identifying such a link would support the development of instructional strategies aimed at fostering both cognitive and affective growth. To test this relationship, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted, due to the non-normal distribution of data. The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6: Spearman's rho Correlation between Religious Literacy and Religious Tolerance Attitudes

.588**
.500
.000
516
1.000
516

The results in table 6 reveal a correlation coefficient of 0.588 between religious literacy and religious tolerance attitudes, classified as moderately strong. With a significance value of 0.000 (p < 0.01), the relationship is statistically significant. This indicates that students with better religious literacy tend to exhibit higher levels of tolerance. The finding confirms that religious literacy not only contributes to cognitive understanding but also plays a vital role in shaping inclusive and peaceful religious attitudes. Consequently, integrating religious literacy development with the cultivation of tolerance should be a central aim in Islamic Education learning models.

Qualitative Needs Analysis: Lecturer Perspectives on Literacy and Tolerance

Quantitative findings revealed that students demonstrated low levels of religious literacy and tolerance, though a significant positive correlation (r = 0.588) suggests that enhancing literacy may lead to greater tolerance. To enrich and validate these results, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with five Islamic Religious Education (IRE) lecturers—comprising three professors and two associate professors. Through structured interviews, the FGD explored the underlying factors contributing to students' limited religious literacy. A total of 167 responses emerged, which were classified into three central themes: (1) confusion over religious terminology, (2) rigid interpretive frameworks, and (3) dependence on

unverified digital content. These insights are illustrated in Figure 2.

As shown in Figure 2, the qualitative analysis identified three primary themes regarding the causes of students' low religious literacy. These include: (1) reduction of meaning in core religious which terminology, fosters exclusivist interpretations; (2) narrow, figh-centric interpretive frameworks that overlook ethical and spiritual dimensions; and (3) overdependence on unverified digital content. These factors were consistently highlighted by lecturers as critical barriers to fostering tolerance in religious education.

Theme 1: Reduction of Religious Terminology Meaning

One of the fundamental issues in students' religious literacy is the narrowing of meaning for key Islamic terms such as *kafir* and *bid'ah*. This semantic reduction fosters an exclusive worldview that can potentially disrupt interfaith relations. This concern was reflected in several lecturers' statements:

"To foster tolerance, students' literacy must be improved, especially their understanding of religious terms like *kafir* and *bid'ah*." (Lecturer 2)

"Efforts to enhance literacy should begin with a correct understanding of terms such as *kufr* and *misguidance*. Misinterpreting these as labels of belief can negatively affect students' attitudes

toward followers of other religions." (Lecturer 4)

"The concept of *kafir* has been reduced to a stereotype for people of different beliefs, whereas the Qur'an does not present it that way." (Lecturer 5)

The narrowing of meaning in religious terminology emerges as a major barrier to developing tolerant attitudes. This finding highlights the need for instructional approaches that can correct and contextualize students' conceptual understanding of Islamic terminology in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

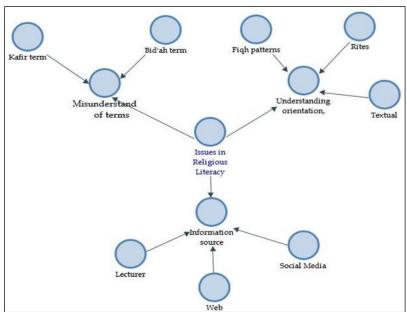


Figure 2: Lecturer's Perspective on Religious Literacy

Theme 2: Narrow Interpretive Orientation

Students' understanding of religion tends to be textual and fiqh-centric. This narrow perspective limits their view of religion to ritualistic aspects while overlooking its ethical, spiritual, and social dimensions. This concern is evident in the following lecturer statements:

"Students often adopt a fiqh-centric orientation, perceiving differences of opinion among scholars as rejection of divine will. As a result, relative matters are viewed as absolute truths." (Lecturer 1)

"Students' literacy needs to be improved to overcome narrow religious views, which are often limited to outward acts of worship while neglecting other aspects of faith." (Lecturer 3)

"Students' religious understanding tends to be focused on fiqh. This is evident from the types of questions they ask, such as: *Is it permissible to pray in a church?*" (Lecturer 4)

"A fiqh-based religious perspective affects students' relations with followers of other religions, as fiqh developed within a historical context that was often less harmonious between Islam and other faiths." (Lecturer 5)

Such a narrow interpretive orientation hinders students from appreciating the diversity of religious thought and practice with openness. This underscores the need for a learning design that emphasizes an integrative approach, combining the dimensions of *fiqh*, ethics (*akhlaq*), and universal human values.

Theme 3: The Gap in Digital Learning Resources

As digital natives, students tend to access religious information primarily through the internet and social media. However, their limited digital literacy skills make them vulnerable to biased, invalid, or even extremist content. This issue was highlighted in several lecturer statements:

"Students need access to accurate and reliable sources when learning about religion." (Lecturer 3)

"As the internet and social media have become students' main sources of learning, our responsibility as lecturers is to equip them with tools to filter such information." (Lecturer 4)

"Lecturers, as students' primary reference, must guide them in enhancing religious literacy through social projects and interfaith collaboration." (Lecturer 5)

Students' reliance on unverified digital learning sources presents a serious challenge in strengthening their religious literacy. Therefore, it is essential to develop a learning model that not only delivers content but also equips students with digital and critical literacy skills to evaluate religious information effectively.

These qualitative findings provide a strong foundation for designing a religious literacy learning model that addresses three key aspects: (1) clarification of religious terminology, (2) broadening of interpretive orientation, and (3) enhancement of digital literacy. The model to be developed is expected to respond to real needs in the field and support the cultivation of religious tolerance among university students

Instructional Model Design

Drawing from both quantitative datahighlighting low religious literacy and tolerance and qualitative insights that reveal contributing factors such as conceptual misunderstandings, rigid interpretations, and reliance unauthenticated digital sources, this study introduces a targeted and contextual instructional model named FAITH (Fostering Awareness, Inquiry, Thinking, and Harmony).

The FAITH model is not limited to theological instruction; rather, it integrates three interrelated dimensions: cognitive, socio-cultural, and affective. The cognitive dimension focuses on enhancing religious literacy through a critical understanding of key Islamic concepts, doctrinal terms, and

religious diversity (15, 34). The socio-cultural dimension emphasizes the development of students' abilities to interact respectfully across religious differences, appreciate pluralism, and engage in interfaith dialogue and collaboration (16, 19). Meanwhile, the affective dimension cultivates empathy, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence—key attributes for promoting interreligious harmony (26).

These dimensions are systematically embedded within the instructional phases of the model. For instance, the Fostering Awareness & Reflection phase encourages students to view diversity as both a theological principle and a lived social reality. The Harmony Building phase requires them to work collaboratively in heterogeneous groups to produce projects that embody inclusive values and peace-oriented attitudes. By combining reflective inquiry, digital engagement, and social learning, the FAITH model operationalizes a holistic approach to religious education that supports not only intellectual understanding but also moral character and civic competence.

The FAITH model is developed with reference to the instructional framework (35), incorporating four core elements: instructional syntax, reaction principles, support system, and social system. It aims to promote deeper religious literacy through reflective learning while simultaneously fostering inclusive and tolerant attitudes in diverse religious settings.

The instructional syntax of the FAITH model is designed as a structured sequence of learning activities to achieve the intended outcomes. Table 7 presents the learning phases, instructional actions, and achievement indicators for each stage of the model.

Table 7: Instructional Syntax of the FAITH Model

Letter	Learning Phase	Instructional Action	Achievement Indicator
FA	Fostering Awareness	Lecturer builds students' awareness of religious diversity as part of divine will through scriptures and social phenomena; students are guided to reflect on personal experiences with difference and are introduced to inclusive Islamic narratives.	Students demonstrate openness to diversity, reflect on personal experiences, and identify inclusive values in Islamic teachings.
I	Inquiry	Students conduct literature reviews using <i>Publish or Perish</i> and journal databases (Elsevier, Taylor & Francis, etc.).	Students identify various religious perspectives and compose a critical summary of the issues studied.
T	Thinking	Students are facilitated to discuss, debate, and construct arguments on	Students demonstrate critical, logical, and evaluative

Letter	Learning Phase	Instructional Action	Achievement Indicator
		religious and social issues logically and rationally.	thinking in discussing religious issues.
H	Harmony	Students work in heterogeneous groups to develop collaborative projects reflecting values of tolerance.	Students show mutual respect, teamwork, and produce projects that embody tolerance.

In the FAITH model, lecturers act as facilitators, offering phase-specific guidance—from reflective questioning to managing inclusive group dynamics. The model is supported by diverse resources such as instructional guides, digital databases, and online research platforms that integrate academic and technological literacy. Collaborative learning occurs during project-based activities, where students are grouped by diverse religious and cultural backgrounds to foster mutual understanding. Instructionally, FAITH develops students' religious insight, critical thinking, and reflective learning; nurturantly, it enhances information literacy and tolerance in a multicultural context. Evaluation combines two methods: performance-based assessment using a 1–2 scale to measure competencies across each FAITH phase, and a 5-point Likert-scale instrument to assess changes in students' tolerance attitudes. Together, these measures offer a comprehensive evaluation of the model's cognitive and affective impacts.

Pilot Testing and Refinement of the Instructional Model

To assess the effectiveness of the FAITH instructional model, a pilot test was conducted using pre-test and post-test measurements on two main variables: religious literacy and tolerance attitudes. The assessment involved a total of 44 students. The descriptive statistical results are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

Variable	Phase	N	Min	Max	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Deviation
Religious Literacy	Pre Test	44	1.04	1.35	1.18	Less Literate	0.09376
	Post Test	44	1.30	1.83	1.51	Well-Literate	0.15896
Religious Tolerance	Pre Test	44	1.50	2.53	2.10	Slightly Tolerant	0.21882
	Post test	44	2.25	4.43	3.18	Well Tolerant	0.61538

Table 8 presents the results of the initial trial of the FAITH model implementation, which show an improvement in the two main variables: religious literacy and tolerance attitudes. Religious literacy scores increased from 1.18 (Less Literate) to 1.51 (Moderately Literate), while tolerance scores rose from 2.10 (Slightly Tolerant) to 3.18 (Tolerant). These results indicate that the FAITH model had a positive impact on strengthening students' religious understanding and shaping tolerant attitudes. However, the outcomes were not yet fully optimal, as disparities remained in several indicators—particularly in the dimension of tolerance. Feedback from lecturers, observers, and students identified several weaknesses, including instructional syntax that was still too general, a lack of structured reflection activities, suboptimal use of scholarly literature, and limited student abilities in critical thinking and collaboration. Moreover, the integration of learning technology

had not been maximized. In response, the FAITH model was refined by developing a more operational instructional syntax, strengthening the phases of reflection and dialogue, forming more heterogeneous student groups, and integrating AIbased chatbot technology to support independent exploration of religious literature. These revisions are outlined in Table 9 as a reference for a more effective and contextually adaptive implementation of the FAITH model in today's learning environments. The revised instructional syntax of the FAITH model includes real-life case studies, AI-supported literature review, structured discussions, academic debates, and collaborative projects. These instructional components are grounded in student-centered learning strategies that place students as active participants in the learning process. Specifically, the model incorporates critical thinking tasks, discussionbased inquiry, and role-playing activities designed

to simulate real-world interfaith and intrafaith encounters. For instance, in the *Harmony Building* phase, students may engage in a role-play exercise where they represent individuals from different religious perspectives in a public dialogue or create scenario-based projects promoting religious coexistence.

These activities are not only intended to improve religious understanding but also to foster empathy, respectful communication, and problem-solving skills in socially diverse contexts. Instructors act as facilitators who guide reflection, provide ethical framing, and scaffold learning outcomes through collaborative design and feedback. Lesson components are adaptable across contexts and may include reflection journals, interreligious dialogue simulations, peer review sessions, and value-mapping exercises based on lived experiences. This approach ensures that the FAITH model is both pedagogically sound and practically applicable in multicultural and pluralistic learning environments.

Table 9: Refined Instructional Syntax of the FAITH Model

Letter	Learning	Instructional Action (Revised)	Achievement Indicator
	Phase		
FA	Fostering Awareness & Reflection	Students engage with Qur'anic texts and real- life cases through guided reflection, small- group dialogue, and personal journaling on diversity and religious values.	Students demonstrate initial awareness of religious diversity, articulate personal perspectives, and identify inclusive values
I	Inquiry with AI Integration	Students conduct critical literature reviews using AI-based tools and engage in dialogical inquiry to compare religious viewpoints across sources.	Students construct balanced interpretations, evaluate multiple perspectives, and present well-reasoned conclusions
T	Thinking and Reasoning	Students participate in structured debates, scenario-based analysis, and problem-solving discussions on religious, social, and ethical dilemmas.	Students demonstrate coherent reasoning, respectful engagement, and the ability to apply religious values to real-life challenges
Н	Harmony Building	Students collaborate in heterogeneous groups to design peace-oriented projects, including role-playing simulations, interfaith dialogue mockups, or video-based campaigns.	Students express empathy, model respectful intergroup behavior, and deliver creative outputs that promote harmony and tolerance.

With this revised instructional syntax, the FAITH model not only strengthens the pedagogical and social dimensions but also accommodates the digital transformation of religious education. The integration of humanistic, collaborative, and Albased technological approaches is expected to enhance students' religious literacy and tolerance attitudes in a more comprehensive and sustainable manner.

Implementation of the Revised Model

After revising its instructional syntax and incorporating technological supports—particularly AI-based chatbot tools—the FAITH model was re-tested in a second trial involving 48 students. This trial aimed to evaluate the impact of the improved model on students' religious literacy and tolerance attitudes. The descriptive statistical outcomes of this implementation are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics Revised FAITH Model Implementation

Variable	Phase	N	Min	Max	Mean	Interpretation	Std. Deviation
Deligious Literagy	Pre Test	48	1.13	1.30	1.20	Less Literate	0.04371
Religious Literacy	Post Test	48	1.56	1.95	1.80	Literate	0.10540
Deligione Telegopee	Pre Test	48	1.80	2.72	2.28	Slightly Tolerant	0.20163
Religious Tolerance	Post Test	48	3.57	4.80	4.06	Tolerant	0.32550

Based on Table 10, the results indicate an improvement in religious literacy, with the mean score rising from 1.20 (pre-test) to 1.80 (post-test).

Both minimum and maximum values also improved significantly, while the standard deviation remained stable, suggesting that the

refined instructional syntax and technological support effectively deepened students' understanding of religious concepts in a more consistent manner. In terms of religious tolerance, the mean increased from 2.28 to 4.06, accompanied by higher minimum and maximum scores and a reduced standard deviation. This

reflects a stronger and more consistent impact of the revised FAITH model on students' tolerance development. To statistically validate the model's effectiveness, a Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was conducted on pre-test and post-test data. The results of this test are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11: Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results

Variable	N	Mean (Pre-Test)	Mean (Post-Test)	Std.Deviation (Post-Test)	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Religious Literacy	48	1.2044	1.7973	0.10540	0.000
Religious Tolerance	48	2.2769	4.0592	0.32550	0.000

The results in Table 11 show a statistically significant improvement in both religious literacy and tolerance attitudes after the implementation of the revised FAITH model. For religious literacy, the mean score increased from 1.2044 to 1.7973, with a significance value of p=0.000, confirming that the improvement is statistically meaningful. This indicates the model's success in enhancing students' ability to critically and contextually

understand religious issues. Similarly, for tolerance attitudes, the mean score rose from 2.2769 to 4.0592, also with p = 0.000, reflecting a highly significant enhancement in students' openness and respect for diversity. To further assess the model's effectiveness, an N-Gain analysis was conducted on both variables to measure the degree of improvement. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: N-Gain Analysis of Religious Literacy and Tolerance

Variable	N-Gain Score	g Category	N-Gain %	Effectiveness	Std.
				Category	Deviation
Religious Literacy	0.7458	High	74.56%	Fairly Effective	0.13220
Tolerance Attitude	0.6525	Moderate	65.33%	Fairly Effective	0.12226

Based on the N-Gain analysis presented in Table 12, the revised FAITH model demonstrates high effectiveness in improving students' religious literacy, with an average N-Gain score of 0.7458 (high category) and a 74.56% increase (fairly effective), accompanied by a standard deviation of 0.13220, indicating relatively consistent achievement across students. For the tolerance attitude variable, the average N-Gain score was 0.6525 (moderate category) with a 65.33% increase (fairly effective), and a standard deviation of 0.12226. Although the literacy score showed slightly more variation, both standard deviations remain low, suggesting that the learning gains were generally uniform. These results show that the FAITH model is not only broadly effective but also inclusive, benefiting students with diverse academic abilities. Nevertheless. reinforcement is needed—particularly in the domain of tolerance attitudes-to achieve more evenly distributed and optimal outcomes.

Discussion

This research highlights the initial conditions of students' tolerant attitudes in West Java Province, revealing that many students have less tolerant perceptions toward followers of other religions. These perceptions are crucial as they influence how individuals react or act in various situations (36). Misunderstandings, such as the perception of the term kafir as a label for non-Muslims, contribute to radical actions and terrorism, as misconceptions about other cultures and religions can lead to violent behavior. This finding aligns with the broader concern in peace education, which posits that education must not only transfer knowledge but also cultivate values of empathy, non-violence, and coexistence (20). Tolerance, therefore, should be treated as a core educational outcome that reflects inner peace and a willingness to build harmony in society.

The research also indicates that this misunderstanding stems from a lack of literacy on

such terms. Izutsu, proposed a semantic approach to understanding the Qur'an, building on Sapir-Whorf's theory, which posits a connection between thought and language (37, 38). Izutsu suggests that the Qur'an changes the thinking of Arabs by enriching the meanings of Arabic words, transforming their understanding of terms. This enriched understanding, according to Izutsu, is key to realizing tolerance, as it enables people to think and act wisely. Misunderstanding terms like kafir can result from a crisis of thinking, driven by confusion of meaning (37, 39). Furthermore, a person's perception is strongly influenced by their literacy level (40). This research confirms a significant positive relationship between literacy and tolerance. To foster religious tolerance, efforts must be made to improve literacy skills, which align with Coller's assertion on the importance of religious literacy for peaceful coexistence (41). Promoting tolerance education requires enhancing literacy competence, as it helps develop a tolerant attitude (42, 43). Religious literacy, as defined by Soules & Jafralie, and Moore, Involves reflecting, communicating, and acting in an informed and sensitive way toward religious phenomena, distinguishing the intersections between religion, society, politics, and culture (44, 45). This is highly relevant to religious pedagogy, which emphasizes reflective, dialogical, and interpretive methods to help learners internalize values through meaningmaking rather than rote acceptance. By adopting a reflective pedagogy, students can move beyond rigid interpretations and develop moral reasoning skills grounded in context and compassion (46, 47). In the context of character education, literate humans are humans with character (47), because literacy is also essentially part of character education, namely the character of learning, the character of curiosity, and the character of sharing knowledge (48). Literate humans have creative, innovative, competitive power, while being able to develop a collaborative attitude (49). For the Indonesian people, building a literate society is a necessity that must continue to be encouraged by educational practitioners, especially academics, considering that the literacy level of Indonesian society is very low. The results of the UNESCO survey in 2012, as quoted by Rusydiyah how that the reading index of Indonesian society was 0.001 (50). This means that for every 1000 residents, there was only one person has an interest in

reading. Efforts to encourage interest in reading are in line with the main messages in Islamic teachings. This also indicates that when Islam encourages every adherent to read "Iqra", then basically Islam has a spirit of openness to all forms diversity. Open-mindedness differences encourages an attitude in dealing with all forms of diversity to understand each other, not judge each other. A true attitude of mutual understanding and respect for differences will only grow in a literate society (51). The main strategy in forming a person's character is through education in the learning process and to form literate people using learning methods, steps, or models (52). This research explores a learning model to improve religious literacy skills in forming an attitude of tolerance, this is in line with what was initiated regarding three models of religious teaching, one of which is the beyond the wall model, namely an educational model that does not just showing an attitude of acceptance or dialogue with people of different religions, but more emphasizing a religious attitude that is tolerant and can work together to build peace, justice, harmony, and actively participate in various humanity activities (53, 54). Through DBR, this religious literacy model for tolerance has succeeded in increasing religious literacy skills and at the same time improving attitudes of tolerance. This aligns with what Seymour described as a "beyond the wall" model one that moves beyond religious identity maintenance toward active participation in justice, harmony, and humanity (47). Moreover, the FAITH model operationalizes principles of peace education by fostering interpersonal empathy and conflict-sensitive reflection, while embracing the goals of multicultural education, such as equity, inclusion, and respect for diversity (22). Its use of heterogeneous group collaboration, AI-assisted inquiry, and values-based projects exemplifies an integrated pedagogical strategy that prepares learners for pluralistic societies. As such, FAITH is not only a tool for improving knowledge, but also a transformative model for character building and social cohesion through education. While the FAITH model demonstrated promising outcomes in fostering both religious literacy and tolerance, its implementation in higher education is not without potential challenges. Institutional limitations—such as rigid curricula, time constraints, and limited administrative support-

can hinder the flexibility required to implement reflective and dialogical approaches Moreover, student resistance may emerge due to ideological rigidity, identity-based sensitivities, or lack of exposure to interfaith engagement (26). Instructor preparedness also poses a significant concern, as not all educators may be equipped to facilitate critical inquiry, mediate sensitive discussions, or model inclusive values. To address these obstacles, this study recommends ongoing faculty training, gradual curricular integration, and collaborative planning with institutional stakeholders. These efforts are essential to ensure that the FAITH model remains contextually adaptive, pedagogically sound, and sustainably applicable within diverse higher education environments. Moreover, the FAITH model may be adapted to religious or community-based educational settings—such as mosques, churches, or interfaith centers—where similar goals of peace education and religious tolerance are promoted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, this study concludes that the revised FAITH (Fostering Awareness, Inquiry, Thinking, and Harmony) model is effective in enhancing both religious literacy and tolerance attitudes among university students in West Java. Initially, students demonstrated low levels of religious literacy and slightly tolerant attitudes, shaped by limited understanding of key religious terms, narrow interpretive perspectives, and reliance on unverified digital sources. Through the integration of a refined instructional syntax, structured reflection, collaborative learning, and AI-based chatbot support, the model significantly improved students' cognitive and affective outcomes. **Ouantitative** analysis showed statistically significant improvements (p = 0.000) in both religious literacy and tolerance, with N-Gain scores indicating high effectiveness in literacy (0.7458) and moderate effectiveness in tolerance (0.6525), supported by low standard deviations reflecting consistent progress. Qualitative insights further emphasized the urgency of addressing semantic misconceptions and the need for critical, inclusive literacy. In sum, the FAITH model proves to be a responsive, inclusive, and contextually relevant pedagogical approach for fostering interfaith understanding and character development in religious education.

Recommendation

The FAITH model should be more widely implemented in religious education to enhance students' literacy and tolerance attitudes. Educators are encouraged to integrate reflective, exploratory, and collaborative activities, while utilizing AI as a learning assistant. However, the use of AI must be accompanied by lecturer guidance and clear usage guidelines to prevent misunderstandings in interpreting religious texts or contexts. Future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact and adaptation of this model in various educational settings.

Limitation

This research is limited in that the number of samples involved is only from universities in the West Java Province, and the focus of the study focuses on literacy for religious tolerance. Therefore, it is very possible to carry out research with coverage outside the province.

Abbreviation

None.

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Author Contributions

All authors contribute equally.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest related to this study or its publication.

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