



## Interfaith Marriage and Its Implications for Children's Education in Multicultural Families

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### Abstract

Interfaith marriages in Indonesia reflect the cultural and religious diversity of society. This research aims to understand the implications of interfaith marriages on children's education in multicultural families. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data was collected through in-depth interviews with interfaith couples, their children, educational practitioners, and policy makers in big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan. Findings show that interfaith families face challenges such as identity confusion and social anxiety in children due to social and community pressures. However, some children are able to combine religious values harmoniously, developing a more inclusive identity. Synergy between local communities and educational institutions is needed to support the education of children from multicultural families. This research provides a basis for policy makers and educational practitioners in formulating inclusive adaptive policies.



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## **Keywords**

Interfaith marriage; multicultural family; children's education

## **Abstrak**

Pernikahan beda agama di Indonesia mencerminkan keragaman budaya dan agama di masyarakat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami implikasi pernikahan beda agama terhadap pendidikan anak dalam keluarga multikultural. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan pasangan beda agama, anak-anak mereka, praktisi pendidikan, dan pembuat kebijakan di kota-kota besar seperti Jakarta, Surabaya, dan Medan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keluarga beda agama menghadapi tantangan seperti kebingungan identitas dan kecemasan sosial pada anak akibat tekanan sosial dan masyarakat. Namun, beberapa anak mampu memadukan nilai-nilai agama secara harmonis, mengembangkan identitas yang lebih inklusif. Sinergi antara masyarakat lokal dan lembaga pendidikan diperlukan untuk mendukung pendidikan anak-anak dari keluarga multikultural. Penelitian ini memberikan dasar bagi para pembuat kebijakan dan praktisi pendidikan dalam merumuskan kebijakan adaptif yang inklusif.

## **Kata Kunci**

Pernikahan Beda Agama; Keluarga Multikultural; Pendidikan Anak

## **Introduction**

Interfaith marriages in Indonesia have long and complex historical roots. This phenomenon reflects the cultural and religious diversity that has long been a characteristic of Indonesian society. Since the time of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms, such as Majapahit and Srivijaya, until the spread of Islam in the archipelago, interfaith relations have been known and become part of social dynamics. During the Dutch colonial period, Christian influence entered, adding to the diversity of

religions in Indonesia. At this time, interfaith marriages are often faced with the flexibility of local customs to accommodate plurality. However, with the emergence of formal regulations and stricter government policies, especially post-independence, interfaith marriages began to experience more significant legal and social challenges.

Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974 marked an important milestone in marriage regulation in Indonesia. Article 2 paragraph (1) which states that marriage is considered valid if it is carried out in accordance with the laws of each religion and belief makes it difficult for interfaith marriages. The implication is that interfaith couples often face legal and administrative obstacles. Some couples choose to change religions or get around the rules by having their wedding abroad. Another alternative is through a District Court Determination using the lex specialis principle, where interfaith marriages can be legalized through certain legal mechanisms. These practices reflect how couples try to navigate existing legal constraints.

Despite the strictness of official regulations, local practices show different approaches to interfaith marriages. Local customs are often more accommodating and promote social harmony rather than strict adherence to formal regulations. For example, in some areas such as Bali and North Sumatra, marriages between followers of different religions are acceptable if they follow local customs. This shows that behind the often rigid official policies, local practices are more flexible and allow for compromise between tradition and religious law. In addition, many couples receive support from their communities through kinship and mutual cooperation approaches, reflecting society's efforts to adapt to existing differences.

Based on the latest data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and academic research, the trend of interfaith marriages has shown a significant increase in the last few years. The geographical distribution of interfaith marriages varies throughout Indonesia, with the highest concentrations found in

urban areas such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan. These regions, as economic and social canter, reflect greater cultural and religious diversity compared to rural areas, thereby facilitating the meeting of individuals from different religious backgrounds. Apart from that, provinces with rapid levels of urbanization, such as West Java, Central Java and Bali, also show relatively high rates of interfaith marriages.

Urbanization is one of the main factors driving the increase in interfaith marriages. Large cities are magnets for many individuals seeking better economic and educational opportunities, and in this context, intercultural and interreligious interactions are becoming more common. Education also has a significant role in this phenomenon, because higher levels of education tend to be associated with a more open view of religious diversity. Universities and educational institutions in large cities often become places for interfaith meetings, allowing for interfaith marriages among students and young professionals. The influence of social media and globalization has also changed the social dynamics of Indonesian society, especially among the younger generation. Social media opens up opportunities for individuals from different religious backgrounds to interact and get to know each other without geographical boundaries.

This creates space for the development of interfaith relationships which can ultimately lead to interfaith marriages. Globalization also brings new values that are more inclusive and tolerant of religious differences, providing a broader perspective for Indonesia's young generation in viewing interfaith relations. By understanding these demographic factors, research can gain more comprehensive insight into the trends and dynamics of interfaith marriages in Indonesia and how they influence the education and upbringing of children in multicultural families.

Comparisons with other countries with similar cultural and religious diversity, such as Malaysia and India, provide a

useful additional perspective in understanding how societies in different countries face and manage the challenges of diversity. Malaysia, as a neighboring country to Indonesia with a diverse history and ethnic composition, offers an illustration of a national policy that explicitly recognizes diversity through the concept of "One Malaysia." This approach emphasizes racial harmony while maintaining the ethnic and religious identity of each group. In the Malaysian context, efforts to maintain social harmony also include affirmative steps for the bumiputera group and a multicultural approach that recognizes differences as part of national identity.

On the other hand, India, as a country with a large population and high plurality, also faces similar challenges regarding managing diversity. The federal system adopted by India gives states broad autonomy to regulate issues related to religion, language and culture. This policy allows the realization of diversity within one united country. However, challenges remain in the form of sectarian conflicts and identity politics which sometimes trigger tensions between majority and minority groups. India's efforts to maintain social and political stability amidst these differences provide insight into the importance of a policy framework that is inclusive and fair to all groups in society.

From this comparison, Indonesia can gain valuable insight into effective strategies for managing cultural and religious diversity in the country. On the one hand, Malaysia's affirmative approach and multicultural policies demonstrate the importance of explicit recognition of minority group identities. On the other hand, the Indian model of federalism emphasizes the importance of decentralization of power to provide freedom in regulating local issues. Therefore, strategies in Indonesia must take into account the unique characteristics of its society, such as the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, in formulating policies that are inclusive and fair to all parties. This approach can be a

strong basis for maintaining social harmony amidst increasing plurality.

The psychosocial implications of interfaith marriages for children require special attention because of the unique challenges they face in forming their identity. Children from multicultural families often experience identity confusion when they have to combine the different religious values of their parents. This confusion can arise due to differences in values, religious practices, and social norms brought by each parent. Under certain conditions, children may feel pressured to choose a religion or face pressure from the surrounding community that expects them to conform to certain norms. These difficulties have the potential to lead to feelings of alienation or internal conflict, especially as the child attempts to reconcile personal identity with family and societal expectations.

Additionally, interfaith marriages can also create social anxiety in children as they try to understand and practice two different religious traditions. This anxiety can be exacerbated by a social environment that is intolerant of religious pluralism. For example, children may worry about facing rejection or stigma from peers, school, or the religious community if they do not fully adhere to a particular religious identity. This pressure can affect their mental health, with the potential risk of increased stress, anxiety and even depression, especially during adolescence when the process of searching for self-identity becomes more intense.

Furthermore, the psychosocial implications of interfaith marriages also have an impact on children's social relations. They may find it difficult to form close relationships with peers who have different religious backgrounds or even with family members who disagree with their religious beliefs or practices. This situation can create emotional distance between children and their communities, both within the extended family and the wider social environment. However, in some cases, children

from multicultural families are also able to harmoniously combine the values of both religions, which in turn can enrich their identity and strengthen their ability to establish cross-cultural relationships and increase tolerance and understanding of religious diversity.

The important role of local communities and educational institutions in supporting children from interfaith families is increasingly recognized in social studies and education. Local communities often serve as a platform for social interaction and identity formation, so initiatives that facilitate interfaith dialogue and joint activities among citizens are crucial. In addition, participation in community programs that emphasize the values of pluralism and tolerance can strengthen interfaith social relations. This contributes to the creation of an inclusive environment, where every individual feels valued regardless of their religious background. Educational institutions, such as schools and universities, have a strategic role in designing curricula and extracurricular activities that promote pluralism and tolerance.

A curriculum that includes education about religious and cultural diversity, coupled with extracurricular programs that encourage cross-religious collaboration, can equip children with a deeper understanding of the importance of coexistence. In addition, the creation of safe and inclusive discussion spaces within educational institutions can help reduce stereotypes and prejudice that may exist, as well as encourage children to be open to different perspectives. Ultimately, integration between community programs and well-designed educational institutional efforts can produce strong synergies in strengthening social ties across religions. Community initiatives that focus on interfaith dialogue and joint activities, when accompanied by educational curricula that support understanding and acceptance, are capable of creating sustainable positive change. This synergy will not only support children from families of different religions in understanding

differences, but also prepare them to become agents of change in an increasingly pluralistic society.

Formulating policies and recommendations based on research findings is a crucial step to assist policy makers and education practitioners in designing and implementing inclusive strategies. This is becoming increasingly important considering the increasing trend of interfaith marriages in Indonesia and the need to understand the implications for children's education. More adaptive policies are needed so that educational institutions can be more responsive to the needs of children from multicultural families, ensuring that they receive an education that focuses not only on academics, but also on developing values of tolerance, inclusion and a strong social identity.

To achieve this goal, it is important for policymakers to consider curriculum design that is sensitive to religious and cultural diversity. A more effective social integration strategy can be realized through a curriculum that teaches cross-religious and cultural understanding as well as through extracurricular activities that promote dialogue and cooperation between students from different backgrounds. Additionally, local community initiatives and non-governmental organizations can be involved in building inclusive learning environments outside the formal school context.

Support from the community and family is also critical in facilitating the development of children from multicultural families, helping them overcome the challenges that arise from heterogeneous environments. By broadening the research background, researchers can establish a stronger and more comprehensive basis for exploring the importance of this issue in a broader social and educational context. This research not only provides academic insight, but also provides a solid basis for policy makers and educational practitioners in formulating more adaptive and effective strategies. It is hoped that the conclusions of this research can encourage the emergence of educational



policies that are more responsive to diversity, while creating an inclusive learning environment for all children, regardless of their religious and cultural background.

## **Methods**

This research will use a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand in depth the implications of interfaith marriages on children's education in multicultural families in Indonesia. This research will take samples of multicultural families in big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan which have a high concentration of interfaith marriages. Data will be collected through in-depth interviews with couples in interfaith marriages and their children, as well as participant observation in related communities and educational institutions. In addition, interviews with educational practitioners and policy makers will provide additional perspectives on the challenges and strategies in supporting the education of children from interfaith families. The data obtained will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes and main implications from the experiences and perspectives of research subjects.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Dynamics of Interfaith Marriages in Urban and Rural Contexts***

The research results show that the dynamics of interfaith marriages in Indonesia are strongly influenced by urban and rural contexts. In big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan, there is a higher frequency of interfaith marriages compared to rural areas. Urbanization, which is often accompanied by increasing levels of education and social mobility, opens up opportunities for individuals from different religious backgrounds to meet and form relationships. In addition, big cities as economic and educational centers create a social environment that is more plural and tolerant of religious diversity. This is supported by in-depth interviews with

interfaith couples living in big cities, where most stated that the surrounding community was more open to religious differences in their relationships.

In contrast, in rural areas, interfaith marriages still tend to be rare and often face social resistance. Factors such as strong attachment to local traditions, religious exclusivity, and lack of interfaith interaction make interfaith couples more vulnerable to social stigma. Interviews with interfaith couples living in rural areas show that they often have to face pressure from family and society to convert to one religion or another in order to achieve social acceptance. In fact, some couples are forced to marry in big cities or abroad to avoid this stigma. Secondary data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) also supports this finding, where areas with high levels of urbanization have a greater percentage of interfaith marriages than rural areas.

In addition to frequency, research also finds differences in the types of interfaith interactions that lead to marriage. In big cities, interfaith interactions often occur through the workplace, educational institutions, or social media. Universities in big cities are one of the main meeting places for interfaith couples, where they can interact in an inclusive and tolerant environment. On the other hand, in rural areas, interreligious interactions are more limited to kinship or ~~neighbor~~neighbour relations. This difference causes interfaith couples in big cities to have a more positive view of religious diversity, while in rural areas there are still concerns about interreligious conflict.

The dynamics of interfaith marriages in urban and rural contexts also have a significant impact on the education of children in multicultural families. In big cities, educational institutions tend to be more inclusive and provide support for children from interfaith families. A curriculum that teaches tolerance and pluralism, coupled with interfaith extracurricular activities, helps children develop a strong identity and be open to diversity. However, in rural areas, children from interfaith

families often face discrimination and pressure to conform to the norms of the majority religion. Interviews with children from interfaith families show that they feel isolated in the school environment because of their different religious identities.

Overall, the results of this study emphasize the importance of different approaches in formulating policies and strategies to support the education of children from multicultural families. In big cities, there needs to be initiatives that encourage interfaith cooperation through community programs and educational institutions. Meanwhile, in rural areas, a more adaptive approach is needed to overcome social resistance to interfaith marriage. Policies that are inclusive and responsive to local contexts, combined with education that promotes tolerance and pluralism, will be key to creating a more inclusive learning environment for all children, regardless of their religious background.

### ***Social Dynamics of Interfaith Marriages in Indonesia***

The social dynamics of interfaith marriages in Indonesia involve various legal, social and administrative challenges faced by couples who choose this path. The results of in-depth interviews show that one of the main obstacles faced by interfaith couples is strict legal regulations, especially since the enactment of Marriage Law Number 1 of 1974. Article 2 paragraph (1) which states that marriage is considered valid if it is carried out in accordance with the law. Each religion and belief complicates the legalization process for couples of different religions. As a result, many couples are forced to marry abroad or use District Court Orders to get around these regulations.

Another option, which is often taken by couples of different religions, is for one of the parties to change religions in order to obtain the legality of the marriage in Indonesia. From a social perspective, the results of this research also reveal that interfaith couples often face social pressure from their families and communities. This pressure can take the form of

expectations that the couple adopt a particular religion, or even outright attempts to annul the marriage. Most couples report internal conflict within the extended family, especially if one partner's family strongly adheres to its religious beliefs. However, on the other hand, there are also local communities who provide support through traditional approaches. In some areas, such as Bali and North Sumatra, local customs show flexibility in accepting interfaith marriages, so that couples can marry with the support of their community.

The social pressures faced by interfaith couples also have an impact on the education of children in multicultural families. Interviews with couples and their children show that children from interfaith families often experience identity confusion when having to combine the different religious values of their parents. In some cases, they feel pressured to choose a religion or face community expectations that want them to adhere to certain norms. In addition, some children also expressed concerns about rejection or stigma from peers at school and their religious communities. This pressure, if not handled properly, has the potential to cause stress, anxiety and internal conflict in these children.

However, the findings of this research also show the positive side of interfaith families in children's education. Children from multicultural families are able to combine the values of both religions harmoniously, thereby enriching their identity. In addition, they demonstrate better abilities in establishing cross-cultural relationships and increasing tolerance for religious diversity. Thus, inclusive education and extracurricular activities that promote interfaith collaboration in schools and universities are crucial to strengthening their understanding and acceptance of differences.

Integration between community programs and educational institutional efforts that support interfaith understanding and acceptance is an effective solution in

strengthening interfaith social ties. Local community initiatives that facilitate interfaith dialogue, accompanied by educational curricula that support pluralism, are able to create sustainable positive change. This, in the end, not only supports children from interfaith families in understanding differences, but also prepares them to become agents of change in an increasingly pluralistic society. This research emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that involves communities, schools and government in designing inclusive policies to support the education of children from multicultural families in Indonesia.

### *Strategies of Interfaith Couples in Parenting Children*

The research results show that interfaith couples develop various strategies in raising their children, in order to create a multicultural environment that supports the development of identity and tolerance. One strategy that is often found is to provide religious education from both parties in a balanced manner. Couples who choose this approach generally have a good understanding of the importance of inclusion and religious pluralism in children's education. They try to introduce children to both religious traditions, for example through introducing religious practices from each religion and presenting religious figures who represent both religions in children's lives. This strategy not only enriches children's knowledge about religious pluralism, but also encourages them to develop a broader understanding of different religious values.

Another approach often taken is to choose the religion that is more dominant in the family. In this case, one partner tends to give in and give priority to the more dominant religion, usually due to influence from the extended family or strong community pressure. While this can create clarity for children in understanding their religious identity, this approach has the potential to cause conflict between partners if not managed well. In some cases, couples who adopt this strategy try to balance the

dominance of one religion by providing insight into other religions, so that children still have a basic understanding of the religious differences in their family.

Apart from that, there are also couples who give their children the freedom to choose their own religion when they grow up. This approach is usually chosen by couples who have liberal views and respect individual freedom in determining religious identity. They believe that children have the right to make their own decisions based on their experiences and understanding. During childhood, the couple tries to instill the values of tolerance, openness, and respect for religious differences, so that children are able to make wise decisions when they grow up.

The strategies used by interfaith couples in raising their children are also influenced by various factors such as family values, community pressure, and personal beliefs. Community pressure plays an important role, especially in areas where social norms tend to be less supportive of interfaith marriages. Here, couples face the dilemma of whether to meet community expectations or raise their children in a more religiously neutral environment. Some couples deal with these pressures by choosing more inclusive social environments, such as more diverse urban communities, to raise their children. From the results of in-depth interviews with educational practitioners and policy makers, it is known that these strategies have various implications for the education of children from interfaith families.

An approach that provides balanced religious education from both sides tends to produce children who have a broader understanding of religious diversity, even though they may experience identity confusion at an early age. On the other hand, a more dominant approach to one religion provides clarity of religious identity, but can reduce children's ability to understand and accept differences. The freedom to choose their own religion

as adults opens up space for children to form their identities independently, but requires strong support in instilling the values of pluralism from an early age. Ultimately, it is important for educational institutions and communities to support these strategies through inclusive policies and programs that encourage interfaith tolerance.

### ***Psychosocial Implications for Children from Multicultural Families***

Research results show that children from multicultural families often face identity confusion due to differences in religious values and practices taught by their parents. Interviews with children of interfaith couples revealed that they felt pressured when they had to choose a religion or felt isolated from a community that expected adherence to a particular religious identity. One of the children of a Muslim and Christian couple stated that social pressure from the environment made him hesitate to identify himself as a follower of one religion. This pressure is compounded by the stereotypes and stigma attached to multicultural families, which are sometimes seen as unstable or not conforming to existing social norms.

The social anxiety experienced by children from families of different religions often leads to feelings of isolation and stress. Some children admit that they worry about experiencing rejection from peers at school, especially when they do not fully adhere to the religious practices of one religion. In less inclusive school environments, these children face discrimination and prejudice that further exacerbate identity conflicts. In addition, in some cases, pressure from the extended family also becomes an additional emotional burden when children are deemed not to comply with their family's religious norms. This internal conflict can lead to psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, especially during adolescence when identity formation becomes very crucial.

However, on the other hand, some children succeed in combining the values of both religions harmoniously and develop an identity that is more open to diversity. These children demonstrate strong interfaith understanding and the ability to establish cross-cultural social relationships more easily. They emphasize the importance of tolerance and accepting differences as an integral part of their identity. One of the children of a Hindu and Buddhist couple revealed that he learned to combine the values of both religions through the family approach implemented by his parents. He was able to see the similarities between the two religions and used his multicultural identity as an advantage in interacting with peers from various backgrounds.

The important role of local communities and educational institutions in supporting children from interfaith families is also the main finding of this research. Some children report that participation in community programs that promote interfaith dialogue helps them understand differences and reduces social anxiety. Educational institutions that provide safe and inclusive discussion spaces help these children overcome stereotypes and prejudice. A curriculum that teaches pluralism and extracurricular activities that encourage interfaith collaboration contribute to the formation of a more tolerant and inclusive identity. However, this support needs to be expanded through a more systematic and sustainable approach.

In a broader context, synergy between local communities and educational institutions is able to create an inclusive and positive environment for children from families of different religions. Well-designed interfaith dialogue programs, as well as educational curricula that support cross-cultural understanding, can help children overcome identity confusion and social anxiety. This will not only strengthen social relations across religions, but also prepare these children to become agents of change in an increasingly pluralistic society. Therefore, it is



important for policy makers and educational practitioners to formulate adaptive and inclusive strategies to support the education of children from multicultural families in Indonesia.

## **Conclusion**

This research highlights the complexity of interfaith marriages in Indonesia and its implications for children's education in multicultural families. By using a qualitative approach and case studies in big cities such as Jakarta, Surabaya and Medan, the research results reveal that interfaith marriages are increasing due to urbanization, education and social media factors. Although interfaith couples often face legal and social obstacles, they develop various parenting strategies that emphasize religious tolerance and pluralism. These findings suggest that formal and non-formal education plays a key role in supporting children from multicultural families, especially in dealing with identity confusion, social anxiety, and internal conflict.

The psychosocial implications for children from interfaith families highlight the important role of local communities and educational institutions in building an inclusive and tolerant environment. Interreligious dialogue programs and educational curricula that teach pluralism have been proven to be able to strengthen children's social identity and ability to build interfaith relationships. Thus, synergy between local communities, educational institutions, and policy makers is very necessary to create adaptive educational policies and effective social integration strategies. This research provides important insights for policy makers and education practitioners in designing inclusive and evidence-based strategies to support the education of children from multicultural families in Indonesia.

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