
EXPLORING MULTICULTURAL VALUES IN INTERFAITH LECTURER COOPERATION: AN ETNOGRAPHY

IMAN SYAFI'I

Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

Corresponding author: imam.syafii@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Abstract

Indonesia's rich cultural and religious diversity poses both challenges and opportunities in fostering inclusive academic environments. This ethnographic study aims to explore the construction and enactment of multicultural values within interfaith academic collaboration among lecturers at Universitas Terbuka (UT), Indonesia's leading open and distance education institution. Utilizing a qualitative ethnographic design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. The study involved four lecturers representing different religious affiliations: Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. Thematic analysis identified three core findings: (1) religious differences are navigated through mutual respect, professionalism, and shared pedagogical goals; (2) multicultural values such as tolerance, equity, and inclusivity are embedded in teaching practices and research collaborations; and (3) interfaith dialogue is facilitated through adaptive and dialogical communication strategies. These findings reveal that UT's interfaith academic practices are grounded in both ethical commitment and institutional support for diversity, contributing to a cohesive and productive academic climate. The study highlights the strategic role of multicultural ethics in enhancing educational quality and institutional resilience. It offers practical insights for higher education policymakers in designing effective frameworks for interfaith engagement and intercultural competence development. Furthermore, this research enriches theoretical discourses on multiculturalism in professional academic settings and suggests directions for future comparative or longitudinal studies to examine interfaith dynamics in broader educational landscapes.

Keywords: academic diversity; ethnographic study; higher education; interfaith collaboration

Introduction

Indonesia, as a nation rich in cultural and religious diversity, presents both challenges and opportunities in fostering social harmony amid difference (Nasir, 2021). In the educational domain, this diversity is exemplified by institutions such as Universitas Terbuka (UT), which serves students from a wide range of backgrounds (Harris, 2013), (Sri Maulidi et al., 2021) and employs lecturers from various religious traditions, including Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. In this context, interfaith collaboration among lecturers is essential for cultivating an inclusive and harmonious academic environment (Ahmad et al., 2024). Such collaboration demonstrates that diversity is not an obstacle, but rather a strength in enhancing educational quality (Adon, 2021). It also holds strategic value for sustaining religious harmony (Mariyono, 2024) and reinforcing multicultural education (Suri, 2021).

Multiculturalism, as articulated by Banks (2008), emphasizes core values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and the recognition of diversity as essential for fostering inclusive societies. These

values are not only upheld as ethical imperatives but also serve as strategic foundations for sustainable collaboration in academic environments, as demonstrated by recent empirical studies (Aderibigbe et al., 2023; Syafi'i, 2023; Sinaga et al., 2023). In the context of higher education, interfaith cooperation among lecturers at Universitas Terbuka (UT) exemplifies the practical application of multicultural principles, illustrating how professional relationships can transcend religious boundaries while embodying multicultural ideals (Idris et al., 2024; Adon, 2021).

However, the ways in which multicultural values are constructed and interpreted in everyday interfaith interactions among UT lecturers remain underexplored, particularly through qualitative ethnographic approaches (Mahendra et al., 2024). Most prior studies focus on multicultural education in the curriculum or student centered pedagogies (Suri, 2021), with limited attention to the praxis of collaboration among educators of different religious identities. In fact, lecturers play a central role (Smolentseva, 2023) in transmitting values and modeling social behavior on campus (Peer, 2013; Wong, 2019). Neglecting the dimension of interfaith interaction among faculty members may weaken the institutional efforts to cultivate a culture of tolerance in academia (Artiles, 2015; Forehand et al., 2021). This is the critical gap that the present study seeks to address by investigating multicultural values in interfaith faculty cooperation at Universitas Terbuka.

While UT's religious diversity is a strength, it also presents challenges. Theological differences (Alfonsus, 2023), stereotypes, and personal experiences may hinder the creation of harmony (Lubis, 2024). These challenges become more complex in a distance learning environment characterized by minimal face-to-face interaction (Munir, 2023). Hence, understanding how multicultural values are applied to mitigate conflict and foster productive collaboration among lecturers is essential (Rahman et al., 2023).

Universitas Terbuka holds a strategic position as a social laboratory for the implementation of multicultural values in higher education. This study not only contributes to the theoretical development of multiculturalism in academia, but also offers practical implications for institutional policy-making. By examining the dynamics of interfaith faculty collaboration, UT may design programs that promote interreligious harmony and strengthen its institutional identity as a university that upholds the values of inclusivity and tolerance.

Previous studies on multicultural values in interfaith cooperation among educators include Sijamhodžić (2023) work on the role of Islamic religious education in intercultural values within pluralistic European contexts; Kruja's (2022) study on interreligious harmony through community-based religious education systems; Toriyono's (2022) emphasis on the urgency of multicultural education in higher education institutions; and Cipto et al.'s (2024) exploration of pluralistic values in academic settings. Daddow et al. (2021) also examined how intercultural literacy and minority voices are strengthened through inclusive religious narratives in universities.

This study offers an original contribution by focusing specifically on Universitas Terbuka and the dynamics of interfaith collaboration among Muslim, Hindu, Catholic, and Protestant lecturers. It addresses three main research questions: (1) How is interfaith interaction and collaboration among lecturers at UT formed and practiced? (2) What multicultural values are actualized through these collaborative practices? and (3) How do these values influence the academic and social climate on campus? These questions are grounded in an identified gap in the literature and align with the primary objectives of the study. Given UT's role as a national open and distance education institution that reaches across geographic and socio-religious boundaries, it offers an ideal setting to examine the lived realities of multiculturalism in professional, interfaith academic contexts.

Literature Review***The concept of multiculturalism in higher education***

The concept of multiculturalism in higher education is rooted in the recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity as essential for fostering inclusive academic environments. Banks (2008) defines multicultural education as an approach aimed at reforming educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups experience educational equality. In the context of higher education, this framework demands institutional practices that promote equity, critical consciousness, and intercultural competence among students and faculty (Gollnick & Chinn, 2017). Nieto (2010) emphasizes that multiculturalism in academia extends beyond celebrating differences; it requires a commitment to social justice, democratic principles, and the empowerment of marginalized groups.

Multiculturalism in higher education refers to an intentional approach that embraces the coexistence of diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic identities within academic communities. As a normative and strategic framework, it supports inclusive pedagogical practices and institutional structures aimed at fostering equity and respect (Mariyono, 2024). In this context, multiculturalism is not merely a moral imperative but an essential pillar in cultivating educational environments that uphold pluralism. Higher education institutions are thus positioned not only as centers for knowledge production but also as arenas for intercultural engagement and the development of global citizenship (Daddow et al., 2021).

The application of multicultural principles in universities has traditionally centered on curricular content and institutional policy. Many studies have explored how course materials reflect cultural diversity or how governance frameworks address inclusivity (Toriyono et al., 2022). However, these formal mechanisms represent only one dimension of multicultural practice. Less attention has been given to the everyday social interactions among academic staff from diverse backgrounds, even though these encounters often play a crucial role in shaping the lived experience of diversity on campus.

Informal faculty interactions such as collaborative teaching, joint research, and professional discussions serve as microcosms where multicultural values are either realized or contested. When educators from different religious or cultural traditions engage with mutual respect and openness, they create a professional culture that models the values of tolerance and dialogue for their students. Such relational dynamics offer fertile ground for the internalization of inclusive norms beyond policy declarations or programmatic interventions (Forehand et al., 2021).

Moreover, multiculturalism in higher education cannot be understood as a static goal but rather as an ongoing process of negotiation and adaptation. The increasing complexity of global societies requires institutions to adopt flexible and context-sensitive approaches to diversity. This includes recognizing power imbalances, addressing historical exclusions, and promoting shared ownership of academic spaces by all members of the university community. In this sense, multiculturalism is both a response to demographic realities and a proactive commitment to educational justice (Adon, 2021).

To be effective, multicultural education must be embedded not only in curricula but also in institutional ethos and interpersonal practices. The role of faculty members is particularly significant in this regard, as they act as both cultural mediators and normative exemplars within the academic ecosystem. Their ability to embody and transmit multicultural values in their teaching, mentoring, and collegial relations is instrumental in cultivating inclusive learning environments. Therefore, further

research into how educators experience and enact multiculturalism is essential for advancing equity and intercultural understanding within higher education settings (Idris et al., 2024; Kruja, 2022).

Interfaith collaboration in academic contexts

Interfaith collaboration within academic environments is theoretically grounded in the frameworks of intercultural communication and dialogical pedagogy. Buber (1958) emphasizes that authentic dialogue marked by mutual presence, openness, and recognition of the other is essential for meaningful engagement across divergent belief systems. Within educational settings, Palmer (1998) asserts that learning communities flourish when the plurality of worldviews is embraced not as an obstacle, but as a generative resource for deeper intellectual inquiry. In support of this, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) highlight the critical role of higher education institutions in cultivating interfaith understanding through structured programs that foster empathy, critical self-reflection, and collaborative problem-solving among participants.

Interfaith collaboration is defined as a cooperative process involving individuals from different religious traditions, founded on mutual respect, shared goals, and an ethic of reciprocity (Adon, 2021). In academic settings, such collaboration encourages constructive dialogue and strengthens educators' social-emotional competencies in navigating religious and cultural diversity (Kruja, 2022). This practice is particularly relevant in an era of intensifying identity-based polarization, both globally and locally, where religious identity often intersects with broader social and political tensions.

Despite its conceptual significance, scholarly attention to interfaith collaboration among academic staff remains limited. The existing literature predominantly centers on student-based interreligious tolerance and classroom engagement (Firmansyah, Syukur, & Ahmad, 2024), with relatively little focus on the dynamics of professional collaboration among lecturers of different faith backgrounds particularly within open and distance education systems such as Universitas Terbuka. This gap underscores the need for further empirical investigation, which the present study seeks to address through an ethnographic inquiry.

Ethnographic approach in educational research

Ethnography in educational research provides a methodological lens to examine social practices within their natural settings through the researcher's immersive and sustained engagement with participants (Jensen, Helles, & Hoff, 2022). It facilitates the exploration of meaning-making processes that are constructed and negotiated through daily interactions, while also attending to the symbolic, cultural, and institutional dimensions that shape those practices (Tobin, 2022).

In the context of interfaith academic collaboration, ethnography emerges as a particularly pertinent approach. It allows for a nuanced exploration of individual narratives, lived experiences, and tacit values embedded in professional and interpersonal interactions among lecturers from diverse religious traditions (Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023). Ethnographic studies thus offer both phenomenological insight and theoretical contributions to the discourse on multicultural and interfaith education, particularly by illuminating how pluralistic values are enacted and contested in real-world academic settings (Lappalainen, Korkiamäki, & Suurpää, 2023).

Methodology

Research design and approach of the study

This study employed a qualitative approach with an ethnographic design, allowing for an in-depth examination of social practices (Jones, 2023), interfaith interactions, and the construction of multicultural values within the academic setting of Universitas Terbuka (UT). Ethnography was selected for its capacity to explore meaning-making processes formed by individuals in their everyday contexts (Hammersley, 2019; Mahendra et al., 2024). The main objective of this research was to investigate how interfaith collaboration among lecturers from diverse religious backgrounds shapes and reflects multicultural values, and how these values influence the broader academic climate.

Research site and participants

This study was conducted at Universitas Terbuka, focusing on study programs that exhibited active interfaith collaboration among faculty members from diverse religious backgrounds. A total of four lecturers participated in the research, selected through purposive sampling. This sampling technique was employed to align with the objectives of qualitative inquiry, specifically to identify individuals with relevant experiences who could provide rich, in-depth information regarding the phenomenon of interfaith collaboration (Creswell, 2013).

The selection criteria included: (1) active involvement in interfaith academic cooperation at Universitas Terbuka, (2) willingness to reflect on multicultural values within their professional experiences, and (3) representation of diverse religious and academic backgrounds. The participants represented five religious traditions: Islam, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Protestant Christianity, with demographic details summarized in the following table:

Table 1. *Participant demographics*

Participant Code	Gender	Religion	Institution	Interview Date
SK	Male	Hindu	UT	January 20, 2025
MD	Female	Buddhist	UT	January 22, 2025
JS	Female	Christian	UT	January 22, 2025
SR	Female	Muslim	UT	January 25, 2025

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of collaborative faculty activities. Semi-structured interviews provided participants with narrative space to articulate personal experiences and reflections. Observations were conducted in both online and offline academic settings to capture the contextual dynamics of social interactions.

Data analysis followed a thematic approach, including open coding, categorization, and the identification of key emerging themes relevant to the study's objectives. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, as well as member checking to confirm preliminary

findings with participants. The researcher's academic background in religious and multicultural studies, along with direct engagement in the UT community, served as both a contextual strength and a point of reflexivity, managed through critical self-reflection to maintain objectivity.

Results

Managing religious differences in academic collaboration

Interfaith interactions at Universitas Terbuka (UT) are grounded in a shared sense of professionalism and unified academic objectives. Lecturers from diverse religious backgrounds including Islam, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism mutually agree that diversity is not a barrier but rather a form of social capital essential for building an inclusive educational ecosystem. Their collaboration is anchored in the recognition of universal values such as justice, integrity, and academic responsibility. As one Hindu lecturer remarked, *"We work together because we share a common vision, not because we must agree on matters of faith"* (Informant 3, Interview, 2025).

This collaboration is sustained through a healthy boundary between personal belief and professional roles. Religious arguments are intentionally kept out of academic spaces in favor of mutual respect and cooperation. A Christian education lecturer stated, *"I avoid theological debates in collaborative spaces. I prefer to seek common ground and remain humble in my interactions"* (Informant 5, Interview, 2025). Such attitudes foster a cooperative atmosphere where religious identity is viewed as a source of richness rather than fragmentation.

Though occasional tensions arise, UT has adopted an adaptive and non-confrontational conflict resolution mechanism. Mediation is typically facilitated by department heads or program coordinators acting as neutral intermediaries. This process is appreciated for its participatory nature and commitment to upholding pluralism. A Buddhist lecturer shared, *"When disagreements occur, we voice them openly, and usually the dean helps us find a middle ground"* (Informant 1, Interview, 2025). This approach reflects the critical role of institutional structures in enabling dialogical reconciliation.

Cultural awareness and inclusive communication strategies also support successful interfaith collaboration. Lecturers adapt their communication styles to use religiously neutral language and are mindful of terminology that may be sensitive. They also accommodate religious observances such as prayer times and holy days. As an Islamic Studies lecturer noted, *"We try to be flexible in scheduling and in our teaching style so that everyone feels respected"* (Informant 2, Interview, 2025). These adaptive practices foster trust and solidarity across religious lines.

Overall, interfaith collaboration at UT is not merely rhetorical but a sustained, everyday practice rooted in tolerance, open communication, and mature difference management. The lecturers' professional relationships illustrate that diversity does not hinder academic productivity; rather, it enriches dialogue and stimulates innovation. A Catholic lecturer reflected, *"We don't just respect each other we learn from one another. Our differences actually strengthen our collaboration"* (Informant 6, Interview, 2025). These findings highlight how religious diversity, when inclusively managed, can enhance both the ethics and excellence of higher education.

Application of multicultural values in teaching and research

Ethnographic analysis reveals that tolerance, mutual respect, and inclusivity are core multicultural values embedded in UT's interfaith academic culture. These values transcend idealistic

discourse and are actively implemented in daily academic life especially in teaching, collaborative research, and institutional interactions. Interfaith faculty consistently exhibit cultural and religious sensitivity in their pedagogical approaches. As one Islamic Studies lecturer affirmed, *"Instead of debating theology, we focus on what unites us our students, our research, and our duties as educators"* (Informant SY, Interview, 2025). This illustrates tolerance not as an abstract virtue, but as a deliberate academic practice.

Equity in participation also emerged as a defining element of interfaith cooperation. Faculty members co-author research papers, develop interdisciplinary curricula, and engage as equals in institutional projects. Rejecting homogeneous religious silos, they embrace epistemological pluralism by integrating insights from diverse traditions. A Christian lecturer explained, *"We contribute from our own expertise without forcing religious interpretations and that's what makes our collaboration effective"* (Informant JM, Interview, 2025). This approach fosters horizontal partnerships and guards against sectarian dominance in academic discourse.

Adaptive communication and mutual recognition further reinforce UT's multicultural ethos. Lecturers adjust language, class materials, and meeting times to respect religious practices. In online tutorials (tuton), it is common to greet students with interfaith salutations and avoid exclusive cultural references. As a Hindu lecturer shared, *"I use greetings from various faiths in my videos so every student feels represented"* (Informant SD, Interview, 2025). These actions reflect intentional inclusivity in pedagogical design and virtual communication.

Furthermore, UT's interfaith practices are embedded in a shared commitment to peacebuilding. Faculty members actively reject polarizing narratives and instead cultivate respectful, dignified spaces that emphasize civic responsibility and humility. As one Buddhist lecturer noted, *"We're not just teaching courses we're modeling how people of different faiths can live and work together with mutual respect"* (Informant BK, Interview, 2025). These practices contribute not only to a pluralistic campus but to a broader societal vision of interfaith coexistence through education.

The role of communication in interfaith collaboration

The embodiment of multicultural values has significantly influenced the academic atmosphere at Universitas Terbuka, fostering a dialogical and inclusive learning culture. By normalizing tolerance as a daily practice, lecturers have established safe spaces where diverse perspectives are welcomed and intellectual engagement across belief systems is encouraged. As one lecturer expressed, *"Our students can voice religiously inspired views freely it adds depth, not tension, to the learning process"* (Informant MD, Interview, 2025). Respect and humility among faculty have also strengthened social cohesion. Collegial relationships are built on empathy and the view that difference is a resource for growth rather than division. This culture reduces marginalization and encourages identity affirmation. One lecturer explained, *"I've never felt the need to hide my beliefs. Everyone respects my boundaries, and I feel truly included here"* (Informant JS, Interview, 2025). This sense of belonging enhances psychological safety and emotional well-being among faculty.

Institutionally, these values have redefined leadership and governance through participatory, egalitarian frameworks. Academic meetings promote equal representation, active listening, and collective decision-making. Faculty roles are rotated regardless of religious identity, ensuring leadership is based on merit rather than hierarchy. As one senior lecturer noted, *"In curriculum development, we contribute based on our expertise not on religious seniority. That's how we prevent bias"* (Informant SY, Interview, 2025). These dynamics have transformed organizational norms and deepened

institutional integrity. Multicultural values at UT also influence community outreach, where interfaith collaboration extends into public service. Faculty members often co-lead community projects involving students and local stakeholders of different faiths, creating real-world models of peaceful coexistence. A participant reflected, “*When we serve together, the community sees Muslims, Christians, and Hindus working hand-in-hand with mutual respect*” (Informant SD, Interview, 2025). These efforts position UT as a credible promoter of interreligious harmony beyond the campus.

Based on the ethnographic data from Universitas Terbuka (UT), interfaith academic collaboration is characterized by creative thinking in managing religious differences through the strategic embodiment of multicultural values and adaptive communication. Lecturers from diverse religious background including Islam, Hinduism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism constructively navigate differences by prioritizing shared professional ethics, such as justice, integrity, and civic responsibility, over theological uniformity. This is achieved through deliberate practices like religiously neutral communication, flexible pedagogical approaches, and inclusive scheduling that respects diverse religious observances. Conflict resolution is handled non-confrontationally through participatory mediation by department leaders, fostering institutional harmony. Moreover, multicultural values are concretely applied in co-teaching, interfaith research, and the design of inclusive curricula that reflect epistemological plurality. Communication practices at UT further sustain collaboration by creating safe academic spaces, promoting mutual respect, and ensuring horizontal participation in governance. These combined strategies not only mitigate interreligious tensions but also generate academic innovation, affirm identity, and model interfaith coexistence for broader society. This analysis affirms that when managed inclusively, religious diversity enhances rather than impedes educational excellence and ethical scholarship.

Table 2. *Thematic analysis of interfaith collaboration*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Theme 1: Managing Religious Differences	Mutual respect and professionalism, mediation and conflict resolution, cultural awareness, adaptation strategies
Theme 2: Multicultural Values in Teaching/Research	Inclusive curriculum design, interfaith research collaboration, epistemic diversity, academic enrichment
Theme 3: Communication in Collaboration	Open dialogue, mutual trust, inclusive academic environment, shared values and civic responsibility

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that interfaith academic collaboration at Universitas Terbuka (UT) is sustained through a strategic management of religious differences anchored in shared professionalism, mutual respect, and a commitment to inclusive values. This aligns directly with the research objective to explore how multicultural values are embodied and operationalized in academic cooperation across religious boundaries. First, the management of religious differences among faculty reflects a conscious practice of multicultural values such as tolerance, justice, and integrity. Participants reported that interfaith collaboration is facilitated by establishing a clear boundary between personal beliefs and professional roles, emphasizing common academic goals over theological debates. This finding resonates with previous studies showing that professionalized interfaith spaces foster cooperation by centering shared values rather than ideological uniformity (Patel & Meyer, 2011).

Furthermore, the participatory mediation approach adopted by UT echoes Astin et al.'s (2011) findings, which emphasize the importance of institutional mechanisms in sustaining inclusive academic environments through democratic conflict resolution.

Second, the application of multicultural values in teaching and research was evident in the co-construction of inclusive curricula, collaborative research across disciplines, and pedagogical adaptations to respect diverse religious identities. Faculty members consciously avoided exclusionary language and created learning environments that affirmed the pluralistic backgrounds of their students. These practices are consistent with the observations of Banks (2019), who argued that multicultural education must move beyond celebrating diversity to actively restructuring teaching and learning processes to be genuinely inclusive. Moreover, the creative thinking demonstrated by lecturers in managing diversity such as integrating epistemological plurality into curricula and co-leading community service initiatives reflects what Gurin et al. (2002) describe as the "diversity engagement model," where exposure to difference fosters greater cognitive complexity and social responsibility. By transforming religious diversity from a source of division into a catalyst for innovation and ethical scholarship, UT lecturers exemplify how interfaith collaboration can enhance both academic excellence and institutional integrity. Thus, the findings of this ethnographic study affirm that when religious differences are managed inclusively, they do not hinder academic collaboration but rather enrich intellectual engagement, deepen ethical commitments, and model a form of coexistence urgently needed in increasingly pluralistic societies.

Conclusion and Implications

From a practical standpoint, the findings hold valuable implications for higher education institutions, especially those operating within open and distance learning models. First, university administrators are encouraged to design interfaith dialogue programs and intercultural communication training for faculty members. These initiatives can foster an academic culture that does not merely tolerate religious diversity but actively embraces it as a strategic asset. Second, policymakers at UT and similar institutions may leverage these findings to formulate inclusive policies that encourage collaborative teaching and cross-faith research initiatives. For educators, the study offers replicable models of adaptive communication and professional ethics that can enhance diversity-conscious collaboration. For future researchers, it opens new avenues for exploring the affective and spiritual dimensions of interfaith academic cooperation and their implications for pedagogical innovation and leadership development, particularly within the context of online learning environments.

While offering robust theoretical and practical insights, this study is not without limitations. First, data collection was confined to a single institution Universitas Terbuka limiting the generalizability of the findings to other higher education settings. Second, participants were primarily selected from faculty members with positive collaborative experiences, which may have produced a more harmonious narrative than the full spectrum of interfaith interaction. Third, the nature of UT's distance learning model limited prolonged in-person observation, potentially obscuring subtleties such as non-verbal dynamics or latent conflicts.

The ethnographic design, while rich in narrative depth, inherently involves interpretive subjectivity. Additionally, the limited duration of fieldwork constrained the potential for extended participatory observation, which is typically a strength of ethnographic inquiry. Future studies may benefit from adopting longitudinal ethnographic methods or mixed-methods approaches to strengthen data triangulation and capture a broader spectrum of faculty experiences. It would also

be valuable to include the perspectives of students to better understand the institutional impact of faculty interfaith collaboration.

In conclusion, this study underscores the transformative potential of multicultural collaboration in academic institutions. By cultivating tolerance, respect, equity, and open communication, institutions like Universitas Terbuka can serve as exemplary models of inclusive education in pluralistic societies. Rather than merely managing diversity, UT demonstrates how inclusive academic ecosystems can be proactively designed to foster innovation, civic responsibility, and interfaith harmony.

This study investigated the formation, practice, and impact of interfaith academic collaboration at Universitas Terbuka (UT) by addressing three central research questions. First, the findings reveal that interfaith interaction among lecturers at UT is formed through shared professional goals and sustained by adaptive communication and participatory mediation. Faculty members intentionally delineate personal beliefs from academic roles, fostering a respectful environment that privileges cooperation over religious contention. Second, the study identifies multicultural values such as tolerance, inclusivity, and equity as central to this collaboration. These values are not abstract ideals but are actively embedded in teaching strategies, curriculum design, and co-authored research, reflecting a deep commitment to epistemological pluralism. Third, these practices have significantly shaped UT's academic and social climate, promoting psychological safety, horizontal governance, and inclusive leadership. The normalization of interfaith cooperation has not only mitigated religious tensions but has also stimulated academic innovation and institutional integrity. Thus, the study concludes that when managed inclusively, religious diversity in higher education is not a liability but a strategic asset that enhances ethical scholarship and exemplifies pluralistic coexistence in practice.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Interview

- SK, Lecturer of Hinduism, Open University, interview in South Tangerang, January 20, 2025
- MD, Lecturer of Buddhism at the Open University, interview in South Tangerang, January 22, 2025
- JS, Lecturer of Christianity at the Open University, interview in South Tangerang, January 22, 2025
- S.R, Lecturer of Islamic Religion at the Open University, interview in South Tangerang, January 25, 2025