



## **Strategic Roles of Teachers in Promoting Interfaith Education for Unity in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to explore the strategic role of teachers in building character education through a multireligious approach in Central Kalimantan. Using a mixed-method approach with a sequential explanatory design, the study combined quantitative analysis of the structural relationships between spiritual engagement, pro-social engagement, interfaith cooperation, and social integration with thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with teachers from five religious traditions (Muslim, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism). Quantitative data analysis used structural equation modelling with a partial least squares approach and qualitative data used thematic analysis with NVivo 14 software. The results revealed that spiritual engagement has a significant effect on interfaith cooperation and an indirect effect on social integration. In contrast, pro-social engagement has a significant effect on both interreligious cooperation and social integration. Thematic findings showed the convergence of teachers' practices in integrating universal spiritual values, facilitating interfaith pro-social activities, developing interfaith dialogue, and creating an inclusive learning environment that supports students' character-building. Expert validation confirmed the successful implementation of interpretive and integrative approaches in transforming religious education from an exclusive to an inclusive, transformative model.

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## **Introduction**

Indonesia, as a country with tremendous ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, faces complex challenges in realizing harmonious social integration. Socio-economic disparities, SARA conflicts, radicalism, urbanization, and poverty are significant issues that must be addressed seriously (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020). In facing these challenges, various efforts have been made by the government and society, but social integration remains a crucial issue that requires a comprehensive and innovative approach. Social integration plays an important role in fostering a peaceful and harmonious society. This process entails developing community bonds, integrating disparate groups, and connecting individuals to power sources. Löhr et al., (2021) discovered that social integration is complex and influenced by various elements, including individuals' and communities' spiritual and pro-social activity.

Spiritual involvement has a significant effect on social integration. Research (Nguyen et al., 2019) found a complex relationship between spiritual involvement and social integration. Likewise, Ruiter & Tubergen (2009) found that religious involvement among Muslim immigrants was negatively correlated with social integration. However, Hendricks et



al., (2022) found that spiritual involvement can contribute to social activities, which can increase social integration. Furthermore, prosocial involvement, on the other hand, describes selfless and voluntary actions to help others or the community. Voluntary assistance, generosity, and participation in community events can help develop social relationships and increase integration. Taimur & Mursaleen (2020) found that people active in prosocial activities have more extensive social networks and higher levels of social integration.

In this context, interreligious instructors are important as change agents and bridge builders between different religious communities in educational institutions. Interfaith teachers are well-positioned to promote social integration by engaging in spiritual and pro-social activities. They can serve as examples of how spiritual principles can be transformed into tangible pro-social actions, bridging gaps between religious communities within the official schooling system. This is consistent with Mulya et al., (2022) educational study findings suggest that engaged teachers in interfaith discourse can promote a more inclusive learning environment and raise students' multicultural awareness.

Interfaith teachers' spiritual engagement in education can take many forms, including teaching universal values from different religious traditions, facilitating interreligious dialogue in the classroom, and incorporating inclusive spiritual practices into curricular and extracurricular activities. Interfaith teachers can use this technique to help students and the school community better understand spiritual diversity while instilling respect and appreciation for differences. This is consistent with Amat et al., (2023) findings suggest that incorporating spiritual teachings from various religions into education helps build empathy and social concern in children while improving academic outcomes and fostering a pleasant school climate.

Meanwhile, interfaith teachers' pro-social involvement in the educational system may include initiating and participating in activities involving different religious communities, such as joint community service projects, cultural exchange programs, or social awareness campaigns involving students from various backgrounds. These events help the school community and provide opportunities for pleasant contact amongst kids from other religious groups, crucial in promoting social integration in educational settings. Shaver et al., (2018) found that religious groups actively participating in pro-social activities are more willing to collaborate with other religious groups, which can increase social cohesion in the education system.

Interfaith Harmonious Cooperation is a critical framework for connecting interfaith teachers' spiritual and pro-social commitment to more extensive social integration in schools. The term refers to the joint efforts of individuals and communities representing various religions and beliefs in an educational setting to foster harmonious discussion, mutual understanding, and constructive cooperation. This method is highly significant to Indonesia's religiously and culturally diverse educational system, particularly in establishing an inclusive and tolerant character education paradigm by Manahung et al., (2022).

Theoretical grounds for this idea include social exchange, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, social identity, social capital, and social solidarity (Cook & Rice, 2006). These theories form the foundation for understanding how interfaith relationships affect classroom dynamics, school culture, and student learning results. According to (Qadir & Saeed, 2020) Research shows that schools that introduced interfaith conversation programs consistently improved academic achievement, reduced student conflict, and increased a feeling of community.

Interfaith harmony and cooperation are based on human equality, mutual respect, open discussion, and collaborative problem-solving ideals. These values are consistent with



the doctrine of religious pluralism (Ives & Kidwell, 2019) and the concept of interfaith dialogue, which emphasizes the significance of exchanging ideas and experiences in an open and mutually respectful environment. Interfaith Harmony Cooperation can effectively bridge interfaith teachers' spiritual and pro-social participation while improving social integration in schools and communities by using these ideas in an educational setting.

Central Kalimantan, Indonesia, with its rich cultural, religious, and ethnic variety, is an intriguing place to investigate these dynamics, particularly in the context of education. Maintaining social cohesion and integration in a region with varied community histories presents distinct problems. The education system in Central Kalimantan reflects this diversity, with schools being situated at the crossroads of several cultures and beliefs. According to a study conducted by the Wahid Institute (2021), schools in Central Kalimantan have a high potential to become living laboratories for tolerance and interfaith dialogue, but they also confront problems in incorporating these ideals into the formal curriculum.

Research in this location can show how interfaith teachers' spiritual and pro-social participation, facilitated by the Interfaith Harmony Cooperation mechanism, might foster social integration in a heterogeneous educational system. The findings of this study are important not just for educational practices in Central Kalimantan but also as a model for other regions in Indonesia that confront comparable issues in promoting unity via education. This study explores the relationship between interfaith teachers' spiritual and pro-social participation, Interfaith Harmony Cooperation, and social integration in the Central Kalimantan educational context. Specifically, this study will examine how interfaith teachers' spiritual engagement affects their classroom participation in Interfaith Harmony Cooperation. In addition, it will assess how Interfaith Harmony Cooperation, launched and guided by interfaith instructors, affects the level of social integration in Central Kalimantan schools and the implications for increasing educational quality and promoting unity in a varied society.

By exploring the relationship between these characteristics, this study hopes to understand better the mechanisms that link interfaith teachers' spiritual and pro-social engagement to improved social integration in the classroom. The study's findings will likely provide an empirical foundation for designing educational programs and policies that promote social integration in Indonesian schools by leveraging interfaith teachers' potential as agents of social change.

## **Research Method**

Mixed methods with sequential explanations were used to analyze this research. This method combines qualitative and quantitative data. The result comprehensively analyzes complex phenomena. (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Based on data from the Central Kalimantan Education Office, as many as 465 teachers teach subjects classified as character education, such as religious education, citizenship education, Pancasila education, counseling guidance, social studies, Indonesian language, regional languages, physical education-health, arts and culture, creativity-entrepreneurship, and local content. These teachers are actively involved in interfaith education programs.

This study used two sampling techniques: a stratified random sampling technique of 234 teachers for the quantitative approach, and represented teachers based on their religion, kind of school, and geographical area. In the qualitative approach, this study interviewed 30 teachers as informants through purposive sampling techniques. Those selected were teachers who had been actively involved in cross-religious and cultural programs for at least two years, and these teachers represented various religions in Central Kalimantan. (Creswell & Clark, 2018).



The four main scales of the research instrument consisted of closed-ended questionnaires. These four main scales were adapted from (Schwinn, 2022), Spiritual Engagement from (Koenig, 2012), and Prosocial Engagement from (Nguyen et al., 2019) (2021). All scales met the validity and reliability established by (Hair et al., 2011). All scales used a 5-point Likert format. Quantitative data were collected through online and offline surveys with the Education Office and related educational institutions. Qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately sixty to ninety minutes, which were recorded with the respondents' consent.

The partial least squares (PLS) approach was used in the quantitative approach. (Chin & Newsted, 1998) to test five hypotheses, which tested the influence of spiritual and pro-social involvement of interfaith teachers, Interfaith Harmonious Cooperation, and social integration (Fassott et al., 2016). Meanwhile, thematic analysis in the qualitative approach follows the (Dawadi, 2020) framework through six stages. This qualitative analysis utilizes NVivo 14 software (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). Furthermore, the quantitative and qualitative analysis results are integrated through triangulation to validate the findings and develop a conceptual model. The resulting model explains the relationship between the research variables. The study has also obtained ethical approval, including the adequacy of information, a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, and data security based on Permendikti No. 20/2018 concerning Research (Drajati et al., 2023).

## Results and Discussion

The demographic profile of 234 teacher respondents in Central Kalimantan shows good diversity. The majority (80.34%) are private teachers, with a gender composition of 41.03% male and 58.97% female. Religious backgrounds vary: Muslim (39.32%), Christian (29.06%), Catholic (20.09%), Hindu (8.55%), and Buddhist (2.99%). Almost all (99.15%) have a bachelor's degree, 69.66% have more than ten years of teaching experience, and 80.34% are married. This diversity illustrates the multicultural context of education in Central Kalimantan. According to (Manahung et al., 2022) findings, teacher diversity can be an important asset in interfaith education because it enriches perspectives and experiences. Meanwhile, the high proportion of teachers with a bachelor's degree and adequate teaching experience supports (Chandra, 2023) that academic qualifications and practical experience play an important role in the success of education programs in areas with cultural and religious diversity, such as Central Kalimantan.

## Measurement Model

The measurement model in PLS tests the validity and reliability of constructs by analyzing the loading factor, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 1. Validity and reliability criteria for each construct**

N0	Concept	Item	Loading Factor	Cronbach Alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	VIF
1	Spiritual Engagement			0.847	0.890	0.618	
	a) Religious practices	SE1	0.827				1.823
	b) Meditation and Prayer	SE2	0.778				1.769
	c) Spiritual Mindfulness	SE3	0.738				1.736
	d) sense of Transcendence	SE4	0.782				1.821
	e) Ethical/Moral Values	SE5	0.801				1.809
2	<b>Pro-Social Engagement</b>			0.839	0.886	0.607	
	a) Volunteerism	PE1	0.769				1.878



	b) Charitable Contributions	PE2	0.786				1.846
	c) Community service	PE3	0.769				1.709
	d) Empathy and Compassion	PE4	0.783				1.906
	e) Cooperative Behavior	PE5	0.790				1.735
<b>3</b>	<b>Interfaith Cooperation Harmony</b>			0.842	0.887	0.612	
	a) Mutual Respect	ICH1	0.792				1.739
	b) Open Dialogue	ICH2	0.764				1.734
	c) Shared Goals	ICH3	0.807				1.808
	d) Inclusive Participation	ICH4	0.775				1.748
	e) Joint Actions	ICH5	0.771				1.674
<b>4</b>	<b>Social Integration</b>			0.849	0.892	0.622	
	a) Social Cohesion	SI1	0.784				1.883
	b) Cross-Cultural Interaction	SI2	0.765				1.794
	c) Equal Opportunities	SI3	0.783				1.724
	d) Sense of Belonging	SI4	0.813				1.837
	e) Civic Participation	SI5	0.797				1.783

Table 1 shows the validity and reliability criteria for four main constructs. The results of the analysis show that all items have a loading factor  $>0.7$ , indicating good convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). The Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are  $>0.8$ , indicating very good internal consistency. The Average Variance Extracted value for all constructs is  $>0.5$ , supporting good convergent validity. The Variance Inflation Factor value for all items is  $<5$ , indicating no multicollinearity problems. PLS analysis shows that all constructs have good validity and reliability. Table 2 presents the correlation between the four constructs that require further interpretation in the research model.

**Table 2. Result of Discriminant Validity (HTMT)**

Variable	Interfaith cooperation harmony	Pro-social engagement	Social Integration	Spiritual engagement
Interfaith cooperation harmony				
Pro-social engagement	0.397			
Social Integration	0.414	0.406		
Spiritual engagement	0.397	0.337	0.305	

Table 3 displays the square root of AVE and correlations between constructs indicating good discriminant validity.

**Table 3. Result of Fornier Larker**

Variable	Interfaith cooperation harmony	Pro-social engagement	Social Integration	Spiritual engagement
Interfaith cooperation harmony	0.782			
Pro-social engagement	0.345	0.779		
Social Integration	0.358	0.349	0.789	
Spiritual engagement	0.348	0.300	0.267	0.786

### Structural Model

In PLS, structural models test the relationship between latent constructs by analyzing path coefficients, coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ), effect size, and predictive relevance.





**Table 4. Determinant Coefficient ( $R^2$ )**

Latent construct	R Square
Interfaith cooperation harmony	0.385
Social Integration	0.397

Based on Table 4, the R Square value for the Interfaith Cooperation Harmony construct is 0.385, while for the Social Integration construct, it is 0.397. According to (Chin, 1998), an R Square value of 0.67 is considered substantial, 0.33 is moderate, and 0.19 is considered weak. In this case, the R Square values for both constructs fall into the moderate category. This indicates that the exogenous variables in the model can explain about 38.5% of the variation in Interfaith Cooperation Harmony and 39.7% of the variation in Social Integration. Although not in the substantial category, these values are pretty good and indicate that the structural model has moderate predictive ability for the two constructs. However, there is still about 60% variation in Interfaith Cooperation Harmony and Social Integration that the variables in the current model cannot explain. Therefore, further investigation is needed to identify other factors influencing the two constructs.

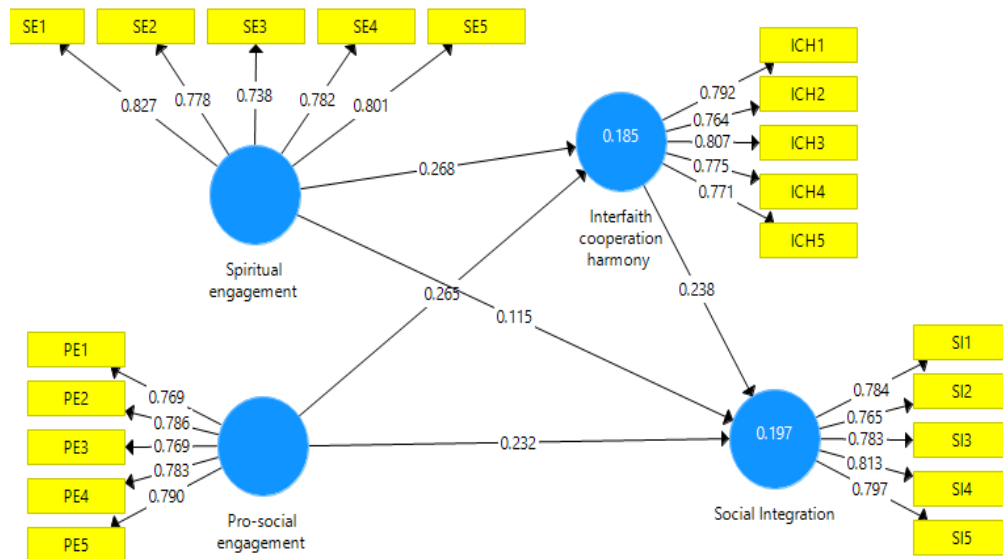
**Table 5. Path Coefficient**

	Path Coefficient $\beta$	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Interfaith Cooperation Harmony Social Integration	0.238	3.719	0.000	Supported
Pro-social engagement $\rightarrow$ Interfaith cooperation harmony	0.265	3.946	0.000	Supported
Pro-social engagement $\rightarrow$ Social Integration	0.232	3.364	0.001	Supported
Spiritual engagement $\rightarrow$ Interfaith cooperation harmony	0.268	4.428	0.000	Supported
Spiritual Engagement Social Integration	0.115	1.816	0.070	No Supported

The path coefficient analysis in the structural model has some significant findings. First, Interfaith Cooperation Harmony has a significant positive effect on Social Integration, which means that the higher the Interfaith Cooperation Harmony, the higher the Social Integration. Second, Pro-Social Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Interfaith Cooperation Harmony and Social Integration, which indicates that the higher the Pro-Social Engagement, the higher the Interfaith Cooperation Harmony and Social Integration. Third, Spiritual Engagement has a significant favourable influence on Interfaith Cooperation Harmony but not significant on Social Integration. Most of the hypotheses in this study are supported by the data, except for the effect of Spiritual Engagement on Social Integration, which is not statistically significant. The t-statistic value above 1.96 and the p-value below 0.05 indicate that the path coefficient is significant at the 5% significance level. (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 6. Indirect effect**

	Path Coefficient $\beta$	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
Pro-social engagement $\rightarrow$ Interfaith cooperation harmony $\rightarrow$ Social Integration	0.063	2.571	0.010	Supported
Spiritual engagement $\rightarrow$ Interfaith cooperation harmony $\rightarrow$ Social Integration	0.064	3.086	0.002	Supported



Structural path analysis shows two important findings: (1) Pro-social involvement indirectly affects Social Integration through Interfaith Cooperation Harmony ( $\beta=0.063$ ,  $t=2.571$ ,  $p=0.010$ ); (2) Spiritual Involvement also indirectly affects Social Integration through the same mediator ( $\beta=0.064$ ,  $t=3.086$ ,  $p=0.002$ ). Both indirect effects are significant ( $t>1.96$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), although the independent variables have no direct relationship to Social Integration. These results confirm the crucial role of Interfaith Cooperation Harmony as a full mediator in transforming spiritual and pro-social involvement into meaningful social integration.

Empirical findings show that spiritual involvement only contributes to social integration by mediating interfaith cooperation and harmony. The absence of a direct effect suggests that isolated spiritual practices are ineffective in enhancing social integration. Only when spirituality is expressed through interfaith cooperation can social integration be realized. This shows the importance of directing spiritual activities to strengthen interfaith relations to achieve meaningful social cohesion while emphasizing the complexity of causal relationships in socio-religious phenomena.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

Teachers from different religious backgrounds provided responses related to the concepts of spiritual engagement, pro-social engagement, and interfaith cooperation and harmony.

**Table 7. Participants' responses from teachers with various backgrounds**

Religion	Spiritual Engagement	Pro-Social Engagement	Interfaith Cooperation Harmony	Social Integration
Muslim	As a Muslim teacher, I implement spirituality and encourage students to reflect on universal Islamic values such as honesty and compassion in character development.	I organized interfaith zakat and sedekah, teaching empathy and social awareness. The 'Care for Others' project brought Muslim and non-Muslim students together	I facilitated the 'Young Faith Dialogue' where students discussed universal values, fostering interfaith kinship. Muslim students became ambassadors of Islamic peace rahmatan lil alamin.	Students from different faiths formed study groups, increasing understanding and acceptance, and creating interfaith networks of learning support and social support.
Catholic	I integrate Catholic values by linking them to universal principles accepted by all religions. Students practice reflection connecting spirituality to action.	I guided students to organize interfaith visits to orphanages and nursing homes. The Interfaith Social Service Program taught active empathy and inspiration.	Through the 'Diversity Festival,' students introduced religious traditions. Catholic students pioneered 'One in Diversity,' making the school a model for interfaith education.	My class developed a 'Diversity Code of Conduct' which is now used throughout the school. Students now form bonds based on interests and talents.
Protestant	I encourage the application of Christian values such as love and forgiveness without imposing beliefs. Students	I created 'Youth for Humanity' involving students in blood donation and disaster	I developed the 'Spiritual Journey' curriculum exploring various religious practices. Christian students	Students created 'Safe Spaces' to discuss religious identity without judgment. This reduced



Religion	Spiritual Engagement	Pro-Social Engagement	Interfaith Cooperation Harmony	Social Integration
	of various religions participate in morning reflections.	relief. This interfaith movement encouraged diverse religious participation.	became pioneers of interfaith dialogue, discussions with other schools.	religious conflict and increased interfaith collaboration.
Buddha	I teach meditation and mindfulness that are appropriate for all religious backgrounds. The 'Mindful Student' program improves concentration and manages stress.	I guided students in the 'Positive Karma' program for selfless community service. This initiative inspired similar programs in schools in Central Kalimantan.	Under my guidance, Buddhist students created the 'Respect for Diversity Forum' studying religious traditions. Students attended various religious celebrations to learn.	I formed multi-faith 'Harmony Teams' to resolve conflicts. This created an inclusive climate where students felt valued regardless of their religious background.
Hindu	I encourage practising Hindu principles like "ahimsa and satya" in daily interactions. My 'Spiritual in Action' approach helps students connect spiritual values with ethical behaviour.	Through 'Dharma in Action,' students identified social obligations and created community projects. They established a school food bank serving underprivileged families.	I created the 'Spiritual Harmony Festival' where students shared religious traditions and values.	Students developed 'Peer Support Networks' that transcend religious boundaries. These groups address religious intolerance and bullying, reducing incidents of discrimination.

## Discussion

This study reveals the complex relationship between spiritual engagement, prosocial behaviour, interfaith cooperation, and social integration in the context of character education. The main findings show that spiritual engagement does not directly result in social integration but must be transformed through interfaith cooperation, which acts as a crucial mediator in the process.

In-depth analysis reveals four interrelated fundamental concepts and builds a comprehensive framework of understanding. Spiritual transformation is the initial foundation, which occurs when religious values are translated into concrete actions that transcend the boundaries of belief. In practice, Muslim teachers emphasize the universal values of honesty, Catholic teachers prioritize love and service, Buddhist teachers integrate mindfulness practices, while Hindu teachers instill the principles of Ahimsa (non-violence) and Satya (truth) in everyday life.

This transformation is manifested in prosocial practices through various programs such as interfaith zakat activities initiated by Muslim groups, but implemented in cross-religious cooperation, also conducting visits to orphanages initiated by Catholics, Protestant youth implementing humanitarian programs, and Buddhists with their positive Karma, while Hindus through Dharma. These initiatives provide empirical evidence that spiritual and prosocial involvement has a significant impact on long-term social integration that benefits the community around the campus (Nalig et al., 2025).

This study strengthens the theory of social capital, which refers to the aggregate of an individual's actual resources derived from the individual's network of relationships (Azad & Pritchard, 2023). Therefore, social capital is an inherent basis in democracy in the context of vertical relationships (students with teachers, teachers with leaders, or leaders with the government) and horizontal relationships (between teachers or between communities in society), which explains how prosocial actions can help reduce intergroup discrimination. In addition, research (Claridge, 2018) on religion-based social harmony supports this study. This study further emphasizes the importance of interfaith cooperation as an important path towards significant and sustainable social integration. Cooperation between religious communities can be important for social integration, creating a harmonious society, and easily achieving common goals.

This study highlights the need to deconstruct character education from a linear transmission model to a dialectical process that turns individual spirituality into communal





social capital via transreligious prosocial practice. Connolly's (2005) agonistic pluralism promotes more than passive coexistence between spiritual narratives; it emphasizes the productivity of creative tensions arising from recognized and valued differences, allowing teachers to orchestrate productive conflict and transform value contestation into collaborative action.

This study shows that character education needs to be changed. Teaching values from teacher to student (one way) and also through a two-way discussion process. The goal is to change personal spiritual values into the common good through positive activities involving various religions. According to Connolly's theory of agonistic pluralism (2005), we are not able to live side by side passively with people of different beliefs. Instead, we need to appreciate these differences as a source of creativity. Teachers can manage conflict productively and change value differences into beneficial cooperation.

Caviglia et al., (2017) trans-dialogical literacy articulates a discursive mechanism that permits seemingly disparate spiritual narratives to connect in liminal regions, resulting in intersubjective syntheses while maintaining each tradition's distinctiveness. Here, teachers act as architects of the in-between space that facilitates the translation and negotiation of transcendental meaning. Based on Habermas's communicative rationality and Benhabib's iterative universalism, this study highlights the transformation of the teacher's role from doctrinal authority to discursive mediator and developer of transcendental pedagogy. The implication is the need for a curricular revolution that shifts the focus from doctrinal indoctrination to the cultivation of meta-spiritual competence, the ability to go beyond spiritual particularities to identify shared ethical ground, thus creating authentic and substantive social integration.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals the strategic role of teachers in developing character education through a multireligious approach. The analysis confirmed significant relationships between spiritual engagement, pro-social engagement, interfaith cooperation, and social integration. Spiritual and pro-social engagement promotes interfaith cooperation and contributes to social integration, both directly and indirectly. The qualitative findings show how teachers from different religious traditions successfully transformed religion-specific values into universal values that all students can accept.

Practices such as interfaith dialogues, social activities, and diversity festivals have proven effective in building understanding, reducing prejudice, and enhancing social cohesion. Expert validation reinforces the belief that a multicultural-religious approach can be the foundation for forming a cohesive national identity in the context of diversity. This research proves that the transcendence of doctrinal boundaries towards universal values practiced in a socio-pedagogical context successfully creates an inclusive learning space and supports the development of intercultural competence.

## **Recommendation**

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that educational institutions adopt a multireligious approach to character education by (1) developing curricula that integrate universal spiritual values from various religious traditions, (2) facilitating interfaith pro-social engagement programs involving students and communities, (3) organizing dialogue forums, diversity festivals, and interfaith collaborative activities regularly; (4) providing training to teachers on interpretive and integrative approaches in multicultural-religious education; and (5) building cooperative networks between schools, families, and religious communities to



create ecosystems that support social integration. Education policy needs to support the transformation from an exclusive model of religious education to an inclusive, transformative model that promotes active pluralism as a positive force in a pluralistic society.

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