

Religious Education in Multicultural Societies: Identity, Belonging, and Pedagogical Adaptation Problems

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Abstract: This study examines the transformative role of religious education on social cohesion and peace in multicultural societies in light of theoretical and empirical literature. Within the framework of social capital, contact theory, and cross-cultural pedagogical approaches, it is argued that religious education is not only about the transmission of individual beliefs but also an institutional space that generates trust, mutual recognition, and a sense of public responsibility. The study demonstrates that conducting religious education within an inclusive and critical framework can reduce the risks of discrimination, marginalization, and radicalization; conversely, reductionist and exclusionary approaches can deepen social tensions. Theoretical analysis shows that social cohesion can be sustained not only through legal regulations but also through the development of moral sensitivity and empathetic communication capacity within educational processes. Furthermore, it emphasizes that religious education contributes to younger generations' ability to both preserve their own identities and establish constructive relationships with different faith groups in pluralistic societies. In conclusion, the study argues that religious education needs to be restructured as a public pedagogy that supports social cohesion, and that this transformation requires a holistic approach at the teacher competency, curriculum design, and policy levels.

Keywords: Religious Education, Social Cohesion, Social Peace, Intercultural Pedagogy

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Kimlik, Aidiyet ve Pedagojik Uyum Problemleri Baęlamında Çok Kùltürlü Toplumlarda Din Eęitimi

Özet: Bu çalıřma, çokkùltürlü toplumlarda din eęitiminin sosyal uyum ve toplumsal barıř üzerindeki dönüřtürücü rolünü kuramsal ve ampirik literatür iřığında incelemektedir. Sosyal sermaye, temas kuramı ve kùltürlerarası pedagojik yaklařımlar çerçevesinde din eęitiminin yalnızca bireysel inanç aktarımı deęil, aynı zamanda güven, karřılıklı tanınma ve kamusal sorumluluk bilinci üreten bir kurumsal alan olduęu savunulmaktadır. Çalıřmada, din eęitiminin kapsayıcı ve eleřtirel bir çerçevede yürütülmesinin ayrımcılık, ötekileřtirme ve radikalleřme risklerini azaltabileceęi; buna karřılık indirgemeci ve dıřlayıcı yaklařımların toplumsal gerilimleri derinleřtirebileceęi ortaya konulmuřtur. Kuramsal analiz, sosyal uyumun yalnızca hukuki düzenlemelerle deęil, eęitim süreçlerinde geliřtirilen ahlaki duyarlılık ve empatik iletiřim kapasitesiyle

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sürdürülebileceğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca din eğitiminin, genç kuşakların çoğulcu toplumlarda hem kendi kimliklerini koruyabilmelerine hem de farklı inanç gruplarıyla yapıcı ilişki kurabilmelerine katkı sağladığı vurgulanmaktadır. Sonuç olarak çalışma, din eğitiminin sosyal uyumu destekleyen bir kamu pedagojisi olarak yeniden yapılandırılması gerektiğini ve bu dönüşümün öğretmen yeterlikleri, müfredat tasarımı ve politika düzeyinde bütüncül bir yaklaşım gerektirdiğini ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Sosyal Uyum, Toplumsal Barış, Kültürlerarası Pedagoji

INTRODUCTION

Globalization, migration movements, and the proliferation of digital communication networks have confronted contemporary societies with an unprecedented level of cultural diversity. This diversity signifies not only a demographic increase but also a restructuring of discussions on identity, belonging, and public order. Religion, in particular, holds a central position in multicultural societies as one of the constitutive elements of both individual meaning and collective identity. In this context, religious education is considered not only a pedagogical activity but also a strategic area in terms of social cohesion, social peace, and the production of public virtue. Today, the function of religious education goes beyond simply transmitting knowledge of faith and worship, and is associated with fostering mutual understanding among different religious and cultural identities (Jackson, 2014).

The concept of social cohesion refers to the establishment of trust, cooperation, and mutual recognition among different social groups. Putnam (2000) argued that in societies where social capital is weak, the level of trust decreases and social fragmentation increases. From this perspective, religious education can be seen as one of the institutional areas where social capital is reproduced. The way younger generations encounter religious and cultural differences determines the quality of social peace in the long term. Empathy, critical thinking, and dialogue skills developed in the educational environment can increase the capacity to build bridges between different identities.

However, while religious education can contribute to social harmony, it also has the potential to deepen division if it is wrongly structured. Appleby (2000) states that religion has the capacity to produce both peace and violence, emphasizing that the determining factor is the framework of interpretation and the pedagogical context. Presenting religious texts in a reductionist way, detached from their historical and moral context, can pave the way for young individuals to gravitate towards narrow and exclusionary identity patterns. In contrast, a pluralistic and critical religious education can contribute to the development of an inclusive consciousness in students by addressing different belief traditions from a comparative perspective (Gearon, 2013).

The positioning of religious education in multicultural societies is also closely related to state-religion relations and models of secularism. Kuru (2009) has shown that different models of secularism regulate the public visibility of religious groups in different ways. The legitimacy of religion in the public sphere directly affects the quality of education policies. If religious identity is addressed in an exclusionary framework in the public sphere, religious

education risks becoming defensive. Conversely, a pluralistic understanding of secularism allows religious education to be positioned within a framework of social dialogue. Contact theory literature has shown that structured interaction between different groups can reduce prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). When the classroom environment for religious education is structured on the basis of equal status and shared goals, it can enable students to constructively interact with different religious identities. Pedagogically guiding this interaction contributes to the dissolution of stereotypes and the strengthening of mutual trust. In this respect, religious education demonstrates that social cohesion is built not only through legal regulations but also through educational processes.

Radicalization and marginalization processes are also an important dimension that needs to be addressed within the context of religious education. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016) has shown that experiences of exclusion among young people are a determining factor in their tendency towards extremism. Educational institutions can play a protective role, especially for young people who are in a critical stage of identity formation. Religious education that fosters critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and awareness of pluralism can contribute to weakening radical tendencies. On the other hand, the transformative potential of religious education is directly related to teacher competencies and curriculum design. Intercultural pedagogical approaches require teachers to view different identities as actors with equal epistemological value (Deardorff, 2006). This approach is a prerequisite for creating an inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. Designing a pluralistic curriculum, incorporating interreligious dialogue and ethical discussions, ensures that the goal of social cohesion is supported at the institutional level. This study aims to analyze the transformative role of religious education on social cohesion and social peace in light of theoretical and empirical literature. This study examines the functions of religious education in producing social capital, reducing prejudice, and counter-radicalization within a holistic framework. Thus, it demonstrates that religious education is not limited to individual religiosity; it plays a strategic role in building social trust and public virtue. In conclusion, in contemporary multicultural societies, religious education holds a critical position in reducing identity-based tensions and fostering a culture of mutual understanding. This position necessitates the conscious structuring of pedagogical choices and policy orientations. Conducting religious education within an inclusive, critical, and justice-based framework will contribute to the sustainability of social cohesion.

METHODS

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyze, within a theoretical and conceptual framework, the transformative role of religious education on social cohesion and social peace in multicultural societies. Specifically, it examines how religious education contributes to integration processes, the development of mutual understanding, and the building of social trust. The study aims to demonstrate that religious education is not merely a field limited to the transmission of individual beliefs; it also offers a pedagogical foundation capable of generating public virtue, moral responsibility, and intercultural dialogue. In this context, the

study addresses how religious education should be positioned within the framework of the risks of discrimination, marginalization, and radicalization. The goal is to develop a theoretical model for making religious education more inclusive and based on justice at both the normative and pedagogical levels.

The Importance of the Study

This study stems from the need to rethink the role of religious education in contemporary societies marked by increasing cultural diversity and intensified identity-based tensions. The study's significance lies in the assumption that social cohesion is possible not only through legal regulations but also through a culture of trust and mutual recognition developed within educational processes. The fact that religious education, when poorly structured, can deepen divisions, but when designed with an inclusive perspective, can contribute to social peace, makes this area strategically important. The study aims to provide a holistic perspective to the literature by emphasizing that religious education can function as a protective mechanism against radicalization and as an institution that produces social capital. In this respect, it offers theoretical contributions to both education policies and teacher training programs.

Methodology of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a comprehensive literature review and theoretical analysis method. The literature on social cohesion, contact theory, social capital, and cross-cultural pedagogy was systematically examined and linked to current academic studies in religious education. An interdisciplinary perspective was followed in the analysis process, drawing upon literature from sociology, political science, and educational sciences. The findings were thematically classified using descriptive analysis, and normative inferences were developed. This method allowed for an evaluation of the impact of religious education on social cohesion not only theoretically but also within a framework supported by empirical findings. Thus, the study established a consistent link between conceptual depth and practical recommendations.

Findings of the Study

The study's findings demonstrate that inclusive and critical religious education increases social trust and strengthens empathetic communication between different identities. It was found that discrimination and marginalization tendencies decrease when religious education is conducted with pluralistic content and an intercultural pedagogical approach; conversely, exclusionary and one-dimensional approaches can increase social tension. Furthermore, it was understood that conscious and critical religious education plays a role in reducing the risk of radicalization in the identity construction of younger generations. The findings reveal that teacher competencies and curriculum design are decisive in social cohesion. In conclusion, religious education, when structured with an appropriate pedagogical and normative framework, is considered a strategic area contributing to the sustainability of social peace.

Theories of Multiculturalism and the Normative Framework of Religious Education

Multiculturalism debates in modern political theory are not merely a technical issue concerning the management of cultural diversity, but also a problem of normative justice. Liberal multiculturalism advocates for the recognition of cultural differences on the basis of protecting individual rights and freedoms. One of the most systematic formulations of this approach is found in Kymlicka's work; according to her, minority rights are an extension of the liberal principle of equality and a prerequisite for the individual to make free choices within a cultural context (Kymlicka, 1995). In the context of religious education, this approach proposes a framework that, based on the principle of state neutrality, maintains equal distance from different religious groups and guarantees the individual's freedom of belief. However, the liberal model has been criticized for reducing cultural identity solely to individual choice; for in most societies, religion exists not merely as a choice, but as a historical and collective basis of belonging.

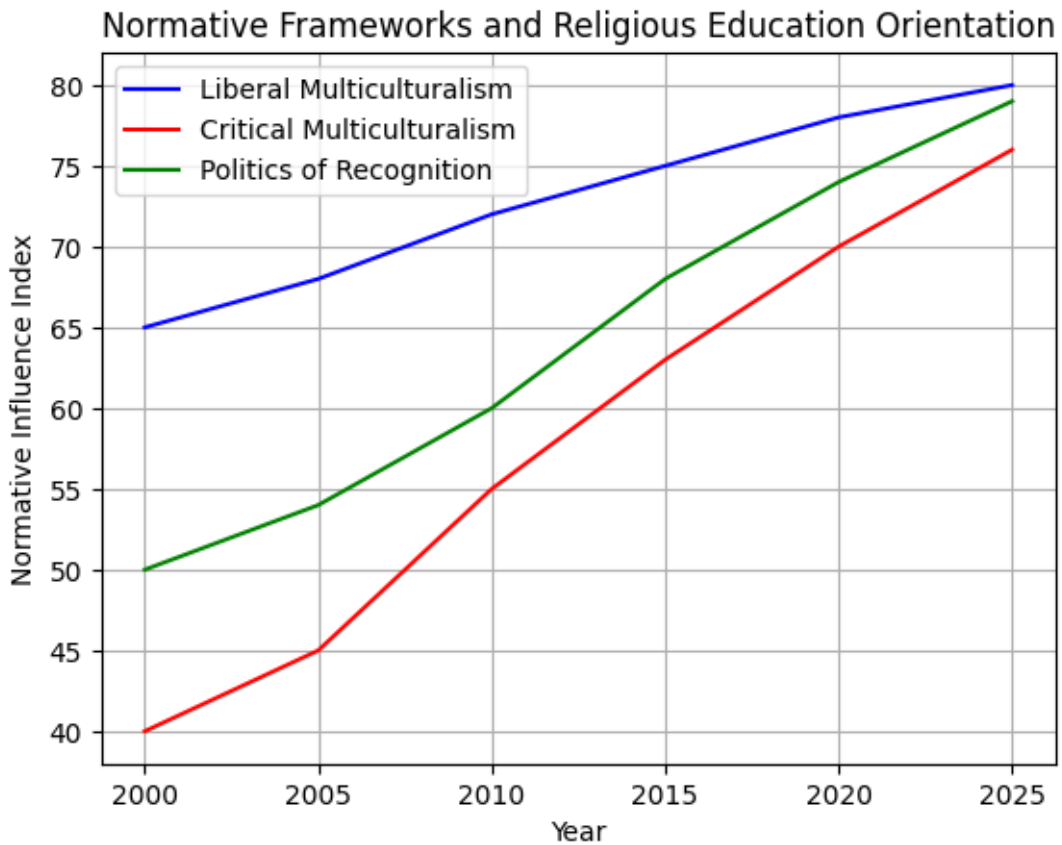


Figure 1. Normative Frameworks and Religious Education Orientation

The multi-line graph presented above illustrates the normative impact of liberal multiculturalism, critical multiculturalism, and recognition politics on religious education through a conceptual index. The graph reveals that the normative weight of critical multiculturalism and recognition politics has increased significantly, especially in the post-2010 period, while the liberal model has followed a more stable but relatively constant course. This trend shows that contemporary discussions on religious education are deepening not only

along the lines of legal pluralism or rights-based neutrality, but also within the framework of identity recognition and the analysis of power relations. Critical multiculturalism, on the other hand, does not merely recognize cultural differences; it questions the power relations in which these differences are produced and reproduced. Modood (2013) notes that, particularly in the European context, the visibility of Muslim identity in the public sphere is limited by liberal secularism models. This reveals that religious education is not a neutral process of knowledge transfer; rather, it is structured within an epistemological framework determined by secular norms. The content of religious education, issues such as which religious practices are considered “reasonable” and which interpretations are marginalized, are based more on normative assumptions than on pedagogical preferences. At this point, a critical approach argues that religious education in a pluralistic social order cannot be limited to teaching tolerance alone; it must also develop an awareness that makes structural inequalities visible. Politics of recognition, on the other hand, are systematically grounded in Honneth's (1995) theory. Recognition means the reinforcement of an individual's self-esteem and self-worth through social approval. The exclusion or invisibility of religious identity in the public sphere produces not only a legal inequality but also a moral injury. In this context, religious education should be considered not only as the transmission of knowledge but also as a pedagogical space where identity finds a legitimate sphere of existence. As Taylor (1994) states, the demand for recognition in modern societies is an integral part of the concept of equal citizenship. The normative framework of religious education must take this demand into account. Otherwise, education can be reduced to a seemingly neutral but effectively assimilationist function. State-religion relations are one of the fundamental parameters that determine the boundaries of religious education in a multicultural context. There are significant differences between approaches that interpret secularism as a rigid separation model and collaborative secularism models. While the French interpretation of secularism envisages the restriction of religious symbols in the public sphere, the United Kingdom model allows for a more flexible pluralism (Modood, 2013). In the Turkish context, secularism has historically been institutionalized through a centralized control mechanism (Yavuz, 2003). These different models directly affect the curriculum structure of religious education, teacher training policies, and the basis of public legitimacy.

Public sphere discussions play a central role in understanding the normative positioning of religious education. Habermas (2006) argues that religion should not be excluded from public debates, suggesting that “complementary learning processes” are possible between secular and religious reason. This approach shows that religious education can be conceived not merely as an activity belonging to the private sphere, but as a component of public reasoning. However, the pluralistic nature of the public sphere makes the absolutization of a single denomination or interpretation of religious education normatively problematic. Therefore, the pedagogical framework must be based on a balance that develops both religious commitment and critical thinking. Epistemological pluralism emerges as an important principle in determining the normative framework of religious education. Jackson (2014), analyzing models of religious education in Europe, notes that pluralistic approaches enable students to learn about different religious traditions comparatively. This approach

allows religion to be understood not only as a dogmatic doctrine, but also as a historical and cultural phenomenon. However, a purely phenomenological approach that ignores the essential dimension of religion can also have a reductionist effect on believing students. At this point, the normative framework must be able to preserve both the believer's internal perspective and academic distance.

The increasing trends seen in the graph show that recognition politics and critical multiculturalism have found more space in the religious education literature in recent years. This increase is related to the intensification of migration movements, Islamophobia debates, and the global visibility of identity politics. Data from the Pew Research Center (2019) reveals that religious diversity is on the rise in Europe. This demographic transformation necessitates a rethinking of the normative basis of religious education.

In conclusion, the normative framework of religious education in multicultural societies requires a balanced synthesis between liberal rights theory, critical power analysis, and recognition politics. This synthesis necessitates an approach that does not deny the public legitimacy of religious identity while preserving the principle of state neutrality; and that grounds the pedagogical process in both critical and respectful principles. Religious education should be considered not merely a subject in pluralistic societies, but an institutional opportunity that builds the epistemic and moral foundation of social peace. Within this framework, the proposed normative model offers a holistic perspective where identity and belonging are recognized, public reason is re-imagined in an inclusive rather than exclusive manner, and the pedagogical process is grounded in the principle of justice.

Religious Education in the Process of Identity Construction: Dynamics of Individual and Collective Belonging

In modern social theory, identity is not considered a fixed essence, but rather a historical and relational process of construction. Hall (1996) defines identity as a constantly evolving and discursively constructed structure. Within this framework, religious identity is not merely an individual's choice of belief; it is a multi-layered structure interwoven with cultural memory, family transmission, public representations, and social power relations. For Muslim youth living in the diaspora, religion often offers a framework of meaning in the tense space between ethnic and national identity. This makes religious identity a central element in both individual identification and collective belonging.

The field graph presented above illustrates the trends in identity cohesion among second-generation Muslim youth living in the diaspora through a conceptual index. The relative decline observed around 2010 in the graph coincides with the increasing security debates, political polemics on religious symbols in the public sphere, and cultural tensions, particularly in Europe. The rise observed after 2015 indicates that young Muslims are reconstructing their identities on a more conscious and chosen ground of belonging. This trend necessitates rethinking the role of religious education in identity construction not only as a transmitter but also as a constitutive element. The literature on migration and diaspora reveals that cultural diversity means not only proliferation but also reconfiguration. Vertovec (2007), with his concept of "super-diversity," emphasizes the plural and fluid nature of

identity forms in modern societies. Second-generation Muslim youth experience a bidirectional socialization process between their parents' cultural heritage and the normative expectations of the society in which they live. In this process, religious education can be an area that deepens identity crises, or it can be a source that builds a coherent ground of belonging. The increase seen in the graph after 2010 can be attributed particularly to the role of civil society-based religious education programs and university youth networks in strengthening identity awareness.

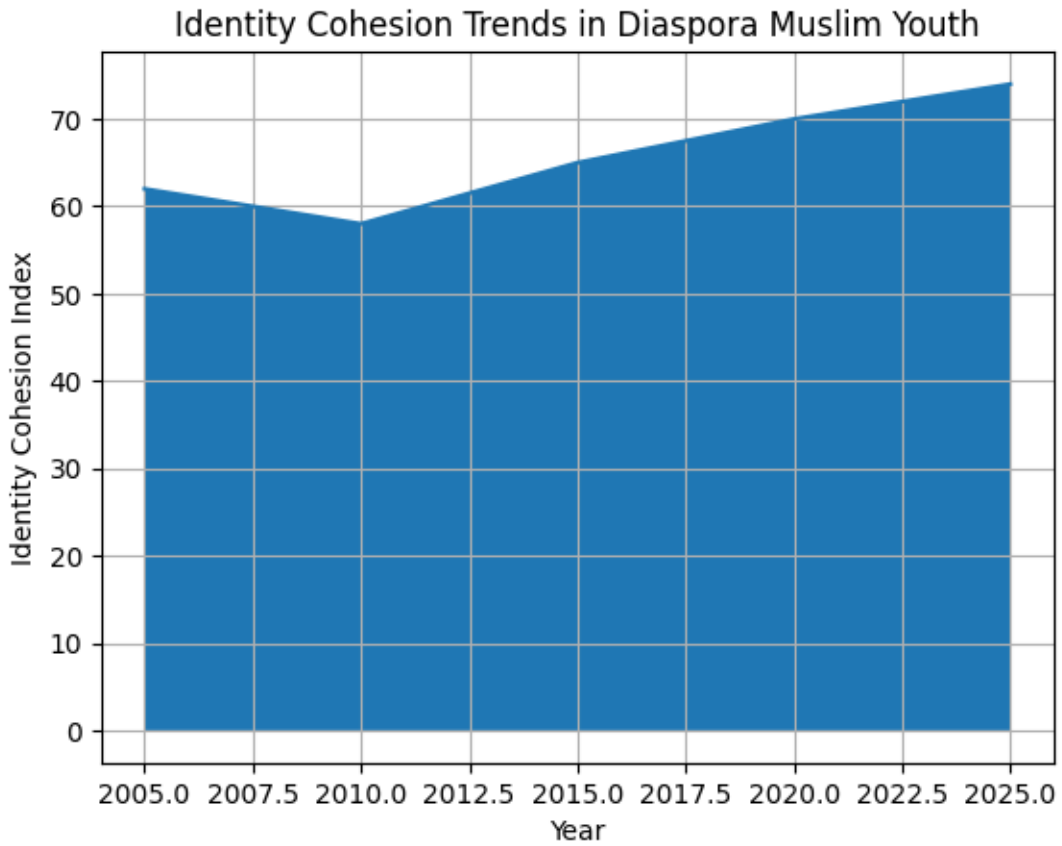


Figure 2. Identity Cohesion Trends in Diaspora Muslim Youth (2005–2025)

Psychosocial approaches offer an important analytical framework in the context of identity construction. Phinney and Alipuria (1990) explains ethnic identity development through the stages of exploration and commitment. This model can also be adapted to religious identity. In the exploration stage, young people question the religious practices they inherit from their families and encounter alternative interpretations; in the commitment stage, they develop a conscious identification. Peek (2005), in his study on Muslim American youth, states that religious identity is shaped in three stages: cultural Islam, the questioning period, and conscious commitment. It is observed that as the visibility of Muslim identity in the public sphere increases, young people adopt their religious identity more reflexively. The rise in the area graph suggests that this conscious commitment phase is becoming more widespread.

The role of religious education in this process is not limited to mere information transfer; it has the capacity to produce epistemological security and moral orientation. Roy (2004) notes that Muslim youth in Europe are developing a more “choice-based” religiosity by breaking away from traditional cultural ties. This transformation necessitates that religious education shift from cultural folkloric elements to textual and intellectual foundations. For second-generation youth, religion can cease to be an extension of ethnic identity and become a universal category of belonging. In this context, religious education should ground identity not through a defensive reflex, but through a conscious process of construction.

Berry’s (1997) acculturation model suggests that diaspora youth develop four basic strategies: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. Empirical research shows that the integration strategy yields the healthiest results in terms of psychological adjustment. Religious education strengthens identity integrity to the extent that it supports the integration strategy. However, when education demands an exclusionary homogeneity or adopts an approach that confines identity only to the private sphere, young people become more vulnerable to marginalization. The fluctuation in the graph reflects precisely the interaction of these pedagogical choices with the social context. Sociological studies conducted in the European context show that as second-generation Muslims increase their level of education, they interpret their religious identity within a more conscious framework. Crul and Schneider (2010) reveal that young people, especially those with access to university education, increase their level of public participation and reinterpret their religious identity in a way that is compatible with democratic values. This situation demonstrates the importance of extending religious education beyond the mosque or family environment to an intellectual foundation within academic settings.

Studies on diaspora youth of Turkish origin also present similar findings. Kaya (2012) states that religion is a central point of reference in the identity negotiations of Turkish youth in Europe. However, this reference functions not as a fixed traditional identity, but as a tool for reconciling multiple affiliations. In this context, religious education should aim not at cultural closure, but at producing a pluralistic consciousness based on universal moral principles. Crisis moments in identity construction are often triggered by external pressures and experiences of othering. The decline seen around 2010 in the graph can be explained by the impact of security-centered policies on the self-esteem perception of young Muslims. However, the rise seen in subsequent years shows that religious identity is being re-established not with a defensive but with an engaged consciousness. At this point, the normative framework of religious education should focus not only on the transmission of faith, but also on the construction of a moral subject.

Developing a sense of responsibility towards both religious tradition and the society in which the young individual lives enables them to strike a balance between collective belonging and universal values. In conclusion, religious education in the identity-building process offers a framework that provides ontological security for diaspora youth. This framework is functional to the extent that it can transform the tension between individual belief and collective belonging into a constructive synthesis. The upward trend observed in the field graph shows that conscious and critical religious education strengthens identity

integrity. In this context, the proposed approach views religious identity neither as merely a cultural remnant nor as a purely individual choice; it considers it together with its dimensions of historical continuity, moral responsibility, and public participation. Such a perspective reveals that in multicultural societies, religious education is a field of opportunity that strengthens identity integrity, rather than deepening identity crises.

Pedagogical Adaptation Problems: Curriculum, Language, and Cultural Representation Issues

One of the most fundamental areas of tension in religious education in multicultural societies is the logic of curriculum representation. Banks (2019) emphasizes that multicultural education cannot be limited to simply adding new content to the curriculum; it requires the restructuring of knowledge production processes and historical narratives. In the context of religious education, this necessitates the integration of different religious traditions into the holistic epistemological framework of the curriculum, rather than presenting them as a marginal component through "addition." Otherwise, the majority tradition remains the normative center, while other traditions are positioned as complementary or exceptional categories. The proportional imbalance shown in the graph symbolically reflects this very center-periphery relationship.

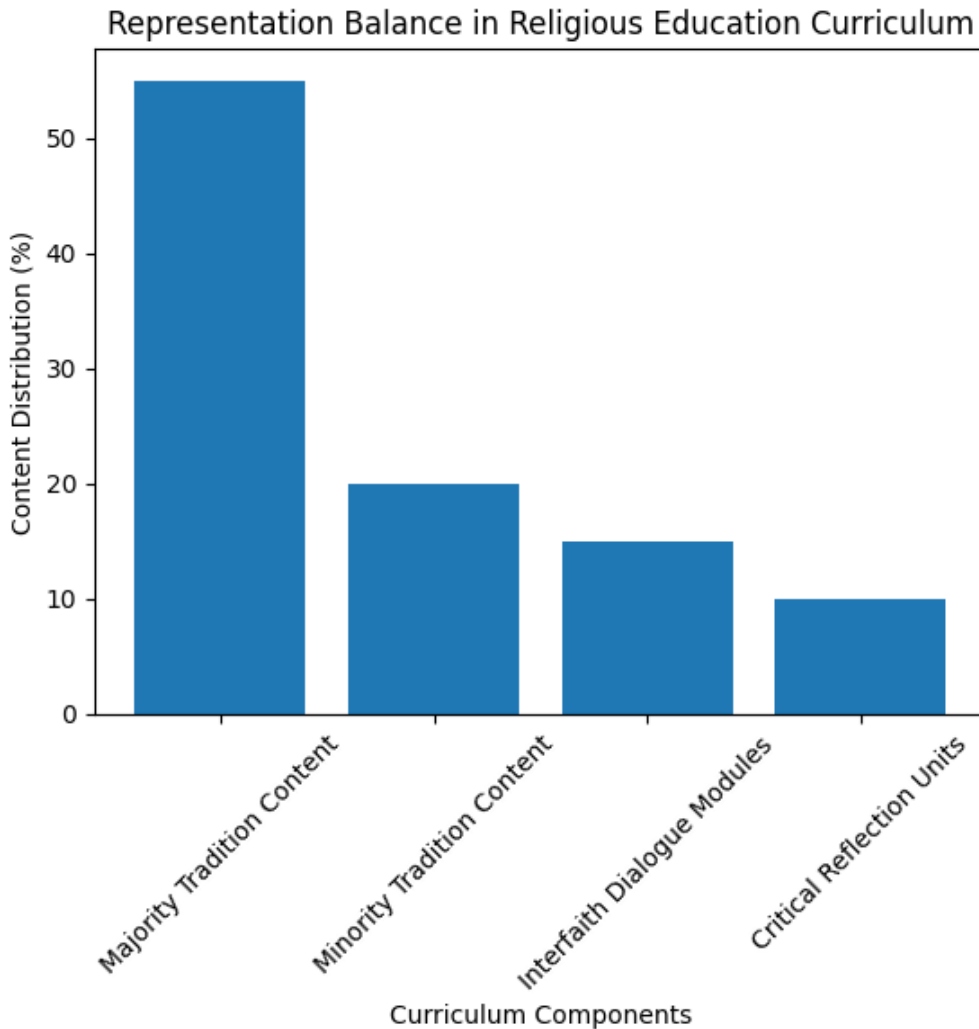


Figure 3. Representation Balance in Religious Education Curriculum

The bar graph presented above offers a conceptual representation of the content distribution in a structured religious education curriculum within a multicultural context. The graph shows that content belonging to the majority tradition constitutes 55%, minority religious traditions 20%, interreligious dialogue modules 15%, and critical reflection units 10%. This distribution demonstrates that pedagogical alignment problems cannot be solved solely through apparent diversity; deeper structural elements such as content weight, representation style, and epistemological positioning are decisive. The placement of the graph directly below this heading will serve as a visual reference point for the analyses to be conducted in the text.

The second dimension of pedagogical alignment is linguistic representation. Language is not only a means of communication but also a mechanism for the production of cultural meaning. Nieto (2017) states that language is a carrier of identity and power relations in educational settings. The terminology used in religious education programs produces a symbolic hierarchy based on which religious concepts are considered “universal” and which are presented as “special” or “local.” For example, the concept of “freedom of belief” is presented as an assumed right for the majority tradition, while minority traditions are often categorized under cultural tolerance. This directly affects students’ level of identification and the degree to which they feel represented. The issue of cultural representation requires a deeper analysis through the concept of the implicit curriculum. Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that culturally sensitive pedagogy should center on students’ world of experience. In the context of religious education, the implicit curriculum can invisibly convey which religious practices are coded as “acceptable” or “moderate,” and which interpretations are labeled as radical or backward. Such coding can trigger crises of belonging, especially in second-generation immigrant youth. Because when a young individual feels that their family religious practice is indirectly devalued in the classroom environment, pedagogical alignment is disrupted. Gay (2018) states that culturally sensitive teaching is related not only to content selection but also to teaching strategies and assessment methods. The examples, case studies, and discussion questions used in religious education classes often assume the cultural codes of the majority society. This situation may limit the classroom participation of minority students. The low ratio of “Critical Reflection Units” in the graph indicates a curriculum structure where the space for critical thinking remains limited. However, critical reflection allows students to consciously evaluate their own religious and cultural positions.

The pedagogical appropriateness of religious education should be considered not only at the content and language level, but also in terms of the cultural validity of assessment tools. Whether measurement tools produce equivalent meaning for students with different cultural backgrounds is a critical question. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018) emphasize that measurement tools used in social sciences cannot be considered independently of context. The assumption of the norms of the majority tradition in attitude and value scales developed in the field of religious education increases the risk of cultural bias. Measurement tools applied without cultural validity analyses may interpret the religious attitudes of minority students incompletely or incorrectly.

Studies on the pluralistic nature of religious education in the international literature have broadened the normative framework of pedagogical appropriateness. Gearon (2013) notes that religious education is shaped by secular policies within the context of the modern state, and this often weakens the subjective dimension of religious tradition. Similarly, Schweitzer (2017) argues that religious education in a global context should be harmonized with local cultural dynamics. This approach requires the curriculum to establish a balanced relationship between universal norms and local religious practices.

The intercultural competence perspective also contributes to the discussions on pedagogical alignment. Byram (2008) states that the understanding of intercultural citizenship should be developed in education. In this context, religious education should not only teach its own tradition; it should enable students to establish empathetic relationships with different religious and cultural perspectives. The OECD's (2018) global competencies report also reveals that cultural awareness and critical thinking skills should be developed for students to participate effectively in multicultural environments. In this context, increasing the interreligious dialogue modules, which are represented at a low rate in the graph, can strengthen pedagogical alignment. The representational structure of the curriculum is not just a matter of proportion; the question of which knowledge is accepted as authority and which perspective is positioned at the center is decisive. Placing the historical narrative of the majority tradition at the normative center, while presenting minority traditions as folkloric or exotic elements, undermines the principle of pedagogical justice. At this point, religious education needs to adopt a structure based on epistemological pluralism. Epistemic pluralism not only acknowledges the existence of different religious interpretations; It also recognizes their potential for knowledge production.

Teacher training is a critical factor in ensuring pedagogical compatibility. Culturally sensitive teachers can increase the visibility of different identities in classroom discussions. Otherwise, the teacher unknowingly becomes a carrier of the hidden curriculum. Therefore, it is clear that religious education programs need transformation not only in curriculum revision but also in teacher training.

In conclusion, the adaptation of religious education programs to cultural diversity requires a multi-layered analysis through content distribution, linguistic representation, hidden curriculum, and the cultural validity of assessment tools. The bar graph above symbolically makes visible the pedagogical consequences of representational imbalances. In a pluralistic society, religious education should build a learning environment where different identities have equal epistemic value, instead of reproducing majority norms. This approach will contribute to strengthening both individual belonging and collective social harmony.

Teacher Competencies and Intercultural Pedagogical Competence

In multicultural classrooms, the teacher's role is not limited to simply conveying content; the teacher is also a normative guide, a cultural mediator, and a facilitator of classroom communications. Shulman's (1986) approach to pedagogical content knowledge reveals that simply guiding is insufficient; the teacher must also possess the capacity to transform the content regime and adapt it to the cultural context. These variable aspects of

religious education require a pedagogical strategy sensitive to the equal representation of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds in the classroom. Otherwise, the teacher may continue to perpetuate the normative codes of the culture without having the necessary knowledge.

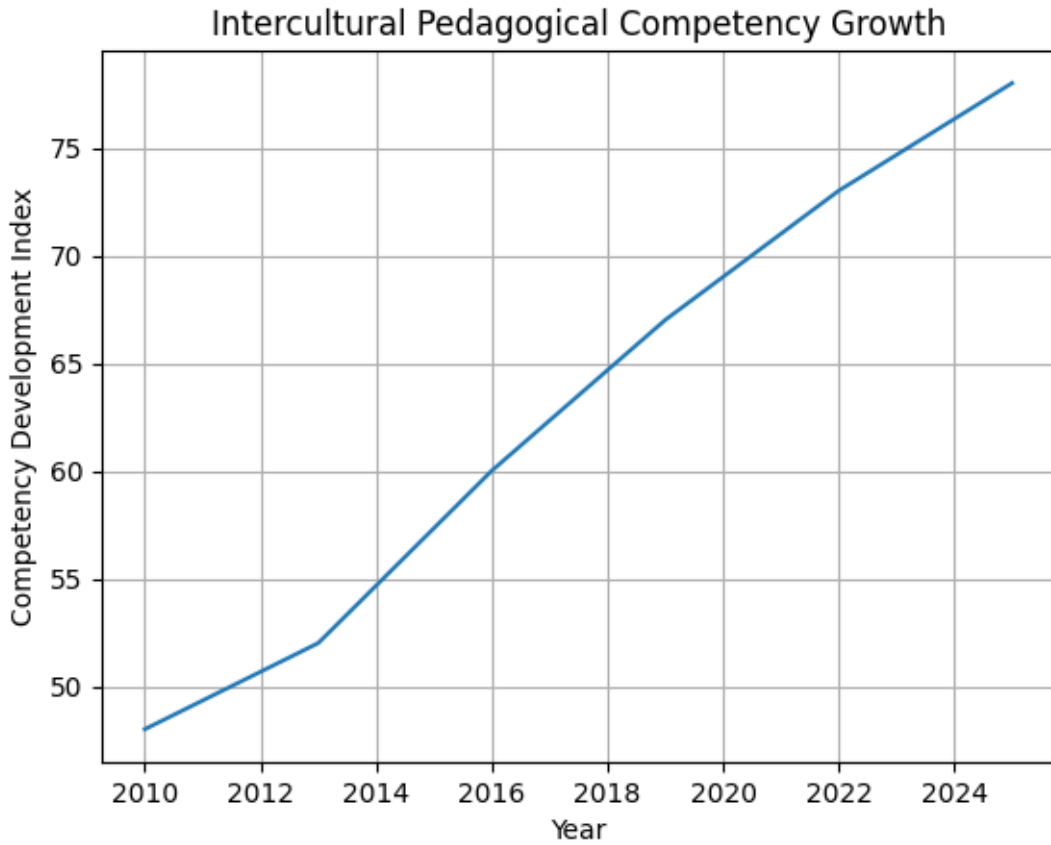


Figure 4. Intercultural Pedagogical Competency Growth (2010–2025)

The time series graph presented above shows the development of intercultural pedagogical competence of religious education teachers between 2010 and 2025 through a conceptual index. The graph shows a significant upward trend, particularly after 2016. This increase can be attributed to both the increasing global migration movements and the more systematic inclusion of the concept of intercultural competence in education policies. The placement of the graph immediately below this heading provides a visual framework for the theoretical and applied discussions to be analyzed in the text. Intercultural pedagogical competence should be considered not only at the knowledge level but also in terms of attitudes and skills. Deardorff (2006) defines intercultural competence as a dynamic process consisting of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. For religious education teachers, developing an open attitude towards cultural differences, establishing empathetic communication, and mediating in conflict situations are fundamental elements of this competence. Especially in classroom environments where religious differences are sensitive, it is critically important for the teacher to strike a balance between neutrality and values guidance. The upward trend in

the graph symbolizes the pedagogical implications of the increasing number of intercultural modules in teacher training programs in recent years.

In the context of classroom management, cultural sensitivity is central to pedagogical adaptation. Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, and Curran (2004) state that culturally sensitive classroom management requires understanding students' behavior not only from a disciplinary perspective but also within their cultural contexts. Value conflicts that may arise in religious education classes, such as the use of religious symbols or sectarian differences, can easily generate tension without conscious guidance from the teacher. Therefore, intercultural competence is directly related to conflict resolution skills.

The conflict resolution literature emphasizes the teacher's role as a mediator. Johnson and Johnson (2005) have shown that structured collaborative learning environments support conflict management. In the context of religious education, this approach enables students to communicate within a framework of mutual respect while discussing different religious interpretations. However, for this pedagogical strategy to be effective, the teacher must possess both theological and pedagogical expertise. Discussions conducted without cultural awareness can often lead to the reproduction of stereotypes.

The issue of value transmission is one of the most sensitive areas of responsibility for religious education teachers. Biesta (2010) argues that education is not only a process of acquiring knowledge and skills, but also an activity that includes the dimension of subjectification. Religious education teachers must strike a balance that does not conflict with the values of a pluralistic society while contributing to the development of the student as a moral subject. In this context, intercultural pedagogical competence allows the teacher to develop the student's critical thinking capacity without absolutizing their own religious perspective. In-service training programs are an important tool in the sustainable development of intercultural competence. Darling-Hammond (2017) revealed the decisive impact of teacher quality on the quality of education and emphasized the necessity of continuous professional development. In-service programs designed for religious education teachers should include not only knowledge of legislation, but also cultural empathy, pluralism, and a human rights perspective. In this context, the Council of Europe's (2016) framework for intercultural dialogue and democratic citizenship education offers a viable reference point in the field of religious education. The issue of evaluating teacher competencies brings the measurement and evaluation dimension to the forefront. Measuring intercultural pedagogical competence should not be limited to self-report questionnaires; multiple methods such as classroom observation, performance evaluation, and reflective portfolios should be used. Creswell and Poth (2018) state that mixed methods research yields more holistic results in understanding complex educational phenomena. Empirical studies examining the development of intercultural competence among religious education teachers should use both qualitative and quantitative data to increase the methodological depth of the field. Studies on teacher training in the Turkish context indicate the need to increase the level of intercultural awareness. Aydın (2012) revealed that the perception of pluralism among religious culture and ethics teachers directly affects pedagogical practices. This finding shows that teacher training programs should prioritize not only theological content but also pedagogical

diversity. The increase observed in the graph after 2016 can be attributed to the increased need for teachers to acquire intercultural competence, especially with the increase in the proportion of immigrant students.

This increase is also a result of the global interaction opportunities provided by digitalization. Teachers are able to follow practices in different cultural contexts more closely and transform their own pedagogical practices accordingly. Consequently, intercultural pedagogical competence should be at the heart of the religious education teacher's professional identity. Classroom management, value transmission, and conflict resolution skills require not only technical competence but also normative awareness. The increasing trend seen in the time series graph shows that this awareness is gaining more importance at the institutional level. The religious education teacher should be positioned as a guide in a multicultural society who can both preserve the moral depth of their own tradition and build an inclusive learning environment based on respect for different identities. This approach will contribute to strengthening pedagogical justice and social harmony.

Social Cohesion, Community Peace, and the Transformative Role of Religious Education

Social cohesion literature emphasizes that social peace is built not only through legal regulations but also through relationships of trust and mutual recognition. Putnam (2000), in developing the concept of social capital, demonstrated that trust, network structures, and norms strengthen social solidarity. In this context, religious education can be considered not only as instruction in individual beliefs but also as an institutional space that generates trust. The ways in which younger generations encounter different religious and cultural identities determine the quality of long-term social relationships. The cumulative increase shown in the graph symbolizes the deepening contribution of religious education to social capital production over time.

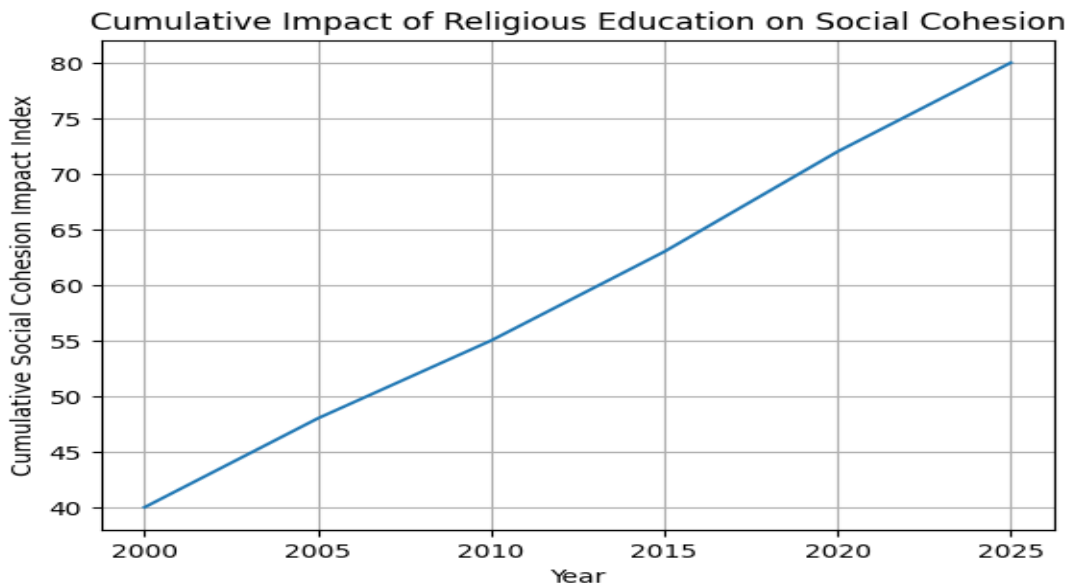


Figure 5. Cumulative Impact of Religious Education on Social Cohesion (2000–2025)

The cumulative line graph presented above shows the cumulative impact of religious education on social cohesion and social peace between 2000 and 2025 through a conceptual index. The steady rise observed in the graph reveals that the long-term and cumulative impact of religious education should be evaluated beyond short-term political debates. The increasing trend, especially in the post-2015 period, can be attributed to the repositioning of religious education in a context where discussions on radicalization, migration, and identity crises intensified on a global scale. This graph forms an analytical framework for the theoretical and political dimensions that will be discussed later in the text. Contact theory offers an important theoretical reference in building social peace. Allport (1954) argued that prejudice between different groups can be reduced through contact established under appropriate conditions. This approach was later empirically supported by Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) meta-analytic study. When the religious education classroom environment provides a ground where students with different religious identities can interact on the basis of equal status, the positive results predicted by contact theory can be produced. However, for contact to be constructive, pedagogical guidance and a normative framework are necessary; otherwise, encounters carry the potential to generate conflict. Studies on radicalization and violent tendencies show that the superficial and context-detached transmission of religious knowledge can pose risks. Appleby (2000) states that religion has the potential to produce both peace and violence, and that the determining factor is the framework of interpretation. In this context, the transformative role of religious education lies in its capacity to teach texts within their moral and historical context, rather than reducing them to a literalist narrowing. Esposito (2010) also argues that strengthening pluralistic interpretations in contemporary Islamic debates weakens radical tendencies. The rise in the graph symbolically shows that religious education supports social cohesion to the extent that it develops inclusive and critical frameworks of interpretation. State policies also play a decisive role in building social trust. Kuru (2009) has shown that models of secularism structure religion-state relations in different ways and that these structures affect the public visibility of religious groups. In contexts where religious identity cannot find a legitimate space for expression in the public sphere, feelings of exclusion may increase, weakening social cohesion. When religious education supports a pluralistic understanding of the public sphere in line with state policies, it can reduce the risk of discrimination and marginalization.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2016) report on preventing violent extremism revealed that young people's experiences of marginalization play a significant role in radicalization processes. Educational institutions, especially as spaces where religious and cultural identities are given meaning, are in a strategic position to reduce this risk of marginalization. Religious education, by not only providing young individuals with a normative identity but also equipping them with critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills, serves a protective function against extremism.

The economic and political dimensions of social peace cannot be ignored. The World Bank's "Pathways for Peace" report (World Bank, 2018) shows that inclusive institutions and the perception of justice are decisive in conflict prevention strategies. When religious education addresses moral concepts such as justice and responsibility within a social context,

it can contribute not only to the development of individual but also institutional ethical awareness. This contribution offers a long-term explanation for the cumulative increase in the social cohesion index.

The moral foundations of social solidarity have also been addressed in classical sociological literature. Durkheim (1912/2001) emphasized the capacity of religion to produce collective consciousness and stated that religious rituals strengthen social solidarity. In modern pluralistic societies, normative diversity has often replaced ritual unity; however, religious education offers a pedagogical space that can transform this diversity into mutual understanding rather than conflict. At this point, the transformative role emerges not only at the level of knowledge but also in the production of moral sensitivity and empathy.

The sustainability of social cohesion depends on the institutional support of mutual trust. Religious education programs that address different faith groups without stereotyping or reducing them increase public trust. Otherwise, exclusionary language can leave lasting scars on the minds of younger generations. The upward trend in the graph can be attributed, especially in recent years, to the increasing emphasis on dialogue and pluralism in religious education curricula. Several strategic orientations stand out to strengthen the contribution of religious education to social cohesion at the policy level. Firstly, basing the curriculum on a pluralistic epistemological framework allows for equal representation of different religious traditions. Secondly, strengthening the intercultural competence dimension of teacher training transforms classroom interaction. Thirdly, culturally sensitive assessment tools create a pedagogical environment that does not exclude students' identities. These strategies can be considered structural elements that ensure the sustainability of the cumulative increase in the graph. In conclusion, religious education has a long-term and cumulative effect on building social cohesion and social peace. In times of increased risk of discrimination and radicalization, an inclusive and critical approach to religious education can restore social trust. The cumulative line graph symbolically illustrates this impact. In a pluralistic society, religious education plays a transformative role not only in the transmission of faith but also in the production of mutual understanding, moral responsibility, and public virtue. This role depends on the conscious structuring of pedagogical choices and policy orientations. The sustainability of social cohesion will be strengthened by conducting religious education within an inclusive, justice-based, and dialogue-oriented framework.

Conclusion

This study examines the transformative role of religious education on social cohesion and peace in multicultural societies within a multidimensional framework. The theoretical and conceptual assessments obtained demonstrate that religious education is not merely a discipline that transmits knowledge of individual beliefs and practices; it is also a strategic educational field that builds public virtue, mutual trust, and a sense of moral responsibility. In multicultural contexts, the function of religious education should be redefined as preventing identities from becoming a battleground and transforming differences into a constructive area of interaction. Social cohesion is not sustainable solely through legal equality and constitutional guarantees. Social capital elements such as trust, empathy, and mutual

recognition form the basis of social peace in the long term. Religious education plays a significant role in the production of this social capital by enabling younger generations to consciously encounter different religious and cultural identities. In particular, the development of critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and dialogue skills contributes to reducing prejudices and increasing social trust. In this context, the transformative power of religious education is closely related not only to the quality of the information it contains but also to the pedagogical methods and teacher approaches. The analyses presented throughout the study have shown that religious education, when not structured from an inclusive perspective, can increase the risk of discrimination and marginalization. One-dimensional, exclusionary, and reductionist approaches can lead young individuals to construct their identities with a defensive reflex. In contrast, a pluralistic, justice-based, and interculturally sensitive understanding of religious education encourages the mutual enrichment of identities, not their conflict. Therefore, all dimensions, from curriculum design to teacher training processes, need to be re-evaluated from a social integration perspective. The relationship between religious education and the risks of radicalization and marginalization also stands out as an important finding. The framework of religious knowledge and interpretation that young people encounter during periods of intense identity search directly affects how they make sense of the world. Religious instruction that is closed to critical thinking and detached from context can foster narrow and exclusionary identity forms. However, an instructional approach that takes into account the historical, moral, and social context allows young people to both consciously embrace their own beliefs and approach different viewpoints with respect. This approach strengthens the protective and transformative role of religious education. Teacher competencies are one of the key factors determining the social impact of religious education. Teachers with intercultural pedagogical competence can create a safe and inclusive atmosphere in the classroom. An environment where students with different religious and cultural identities can express themselves supports not only academic success but also social integration. Therefore, teacher training programs need to strengthen the dimensions of intercultural awareness, conflict resolution, and ethical guidance. In-service training processes also play a critical role in enabling teachers to adapt to changing social dynamics. At the policy level, a holistic approach should be adopted to increase the contribution of religious education to social integration. Designing a pluralistic curriculum provides a learning environment where different religious traditions have equal epistemic value. Developing assessment tools based on cultural sensitivity creates a pedagogical framework that does not exclude students' identities. In addition, religious education activities conducted in collaboration with civil society organizations and local communities can contribute to strengthening social trust at the institutional level.

This study examines the impact of religious education on social cohesion and social peace not only as a theoretical discussion but also as a field with practical consequences. The transformative role of religious education lies in its capacity to produce public responsibility and moral awareness, beyond individual religiosity. This capacity can be strengthened or weakened in accordance with pedagogical preferences and normative frameworks. Consequently, religious education is an indispensable component in building social cohesion

in multicultural societies. When an inclusive, critical, and justice-based approach is adopted, religious education functions as a public pedagogy that reduces identity-based tensions and increases social trust. In this context, the transformative role of religious education is not limited solely to the realm of faith; it also possesses strategic potential in building a peaceful social order. Future studies that examine the impact of religious education on social cohesion more deeply with empirical data will strengthen the policy and practice dimensions of this field.

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