

Multicultural Interpretation and Hermeneutics of Islamic Education Philosophy: Frithjof Schuon's Perennialism Perspective in Urban Society

Muhammad Abdul Anam*, Hamdanah Hamdanah, Mazrur Mazrur

Universitas Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia

*elvatazaya@gmail.com

Abstract

Urban communities face complex challenges in Islamic education due to cultural diversity and tendencies toward religious formalism. As a multi-ethnic city, Palangka Raya requires an inclusive and spiritually meaningful approach to Islamic education. This article analyses the role of multicultural interpretation and philosophical hermeneutics in urban Islamic education through the perspective of Frithjof Schuon's perennialism. This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature studies contextualized with the social reality of Palangka Raya and supported by limited interviews with educators and Islamic education figures. The analysis was conducted interpretively through philosophical synthesis. The results of the study show that multicultural interpretation functions as an inclusive ethical framework, philosophical hermeneutics encourages dialogical and contextual understanding, while Schuon's perennialism becomes a metaphysical foundation that integrates the exoteric and esoteric dimensions. The novelty of this research lies in the formulation of an integrative epistemological framework for the development of Islamic education in urban communities.

Keywords: **Multicultural Interpretation; Philosophical Hermeneutics; Perennialism; Islamic Education; Urban Society**

Abstrak

Komunitas urban menghadapi tantangan pendidikan Islam yang kompleks akibat keberagaman budaya dan kecenderungan formalisme agama. Palangka Raya sebagai kota multietnis memerlukan pendekatan pendidikan Islam yang inklusif dan bermakna secara spiritual. Artikel ini menganalisis peran tafsir multikultural dan hermeneutika filosofis dalam pendidikan Islam perkotaan melalui perspektif perennialisme Frithjof Schuon. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi literatur yang dikontekstualkan dengan realitas sosial Palangka Raya serta didukung wawancara terbatas dengan pendidik dan tokoh pendidikan Islam. Analisis dilakukan secara interpretatif melalui sintesis filosofis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa tafsir multikultural berfungsi sebagai kerangka etis inklusif, hermeneutika filosofis mendorong pemahaman dialogis dan kontekstual, sementara perennialisme Schuon menjadi landasan metafisis yang mengintegrasikan dimensi eksoteris dan esoteris. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada perumusan kerangka epistemologis integratif bagi pengembangan pendidikan Islam di komunitas urban.

Kata Kunci: **Tafsir Multikultural; Hermeneutika Filsafat; Perenialisme; Pendidikan Islam; Masyarakat Urban**

Introduction

The development of urban communities in Indonesia has significantly transformed patterns of religious diversity and Islamic educational practices. Urbanization, high social mobility, and intensive intercultural encounters have produced pluralistic and dynamic social spaces (Saitta, 2020; Saitta, 2020; Vertovec, 2023).

Palangka Raya, the capital of Central Kalimantan, represents a distinctive urban-cultural context marked by ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity. Indigenous Dayak communities coexist with Banjar, Javanese, Madurese, and other migrant groups, forming a complex social landscape. The openness of Dayak culture, exemplified by the Huma Betang tradition as a shared living space, reflects long-standing values of coexistence and mutual respect (Anwar et al., 2025).

Within this setting, Islamic education functions not only as a medium for transmitting normative teachings but also as a strategic arena for cultivating religious awareness responsive to plurality and social change (Tuna, 2024). Islamic education in urban cultural societies faces increasing challenges amid modernity and the rationalization of everyday life (Sitti and Rosyalita, 2025). Religious practice is often reduced to symbolic and formalistic expressions, risking the erosion of spiritual depth. At the same time, cultural and religious plurality demands inclusive and dialogical educational approaches to prevent exclusivism and potential social tensions (Wargo et al., 2024).

This condition reflects a fundamental tension between normative religious teachings and the contextual needs of urban communities (Lahmar, 2020). The expansion of social media further complicates this dynamic, as platforms such as Instagram have become spaces where modern lifestyles intersect with religious expression (Haliza et al., 2025). Studies indicate that religious symbols and expressions in urban contexts require deeper interpretive engagement to avoid superficial understanding Surawan et al., (2023) underscoring the urgency of contextual yet spiritually grounded Islamic education. However, dominant interpretive approaches in Islamic education continue to rely heavily on textual and legalistic readings (Saada and Magadlah, 2021).

While essential for preserving doctrinal integrity, such approaches often overlook students' socio-cultural realities, particularly in diverse urban settings like Palangka Raya. A rigid textual orientation risks producing forms of religious understanding that are insufficiently adaptive to cultural diversity. In response, philosophical hermeneutics offers an alternative by viewing religious texts as dynamic discourses shaped through interaction between text, interpreter, and social context (Ganzevoort, 2022; Alak, 2023). In Islamic education, hermeneutics facilitates dialogical engagement between texts, tradition, and lived experience Abdullah (2022) enriching interpretation by incorporating historical, linguistic, and social dimensions (Altintas, 2021).

Nevertheless, hermeneutical approaches have faced epistemological critiques. Excessive emphasis on historical and sociological dimensions may obscure the transcendental aspects of religious texts Lourdunathan (2020); Kögler (2020) potentially leading to relativism in which religious meaning is reduced to shifting social constructs (Udeani, 2021). In educational contexts, this tendency risks diminishing religion to ethical discourse devoid of spiritual depth. Parallel to this debate, multicultural interpretation has emerged as an approach that acknowledges cultural and religious diversity as an integral social reality (Tobroni et al., 2025).

Empirical studies suggest that multicultural interpretation contributes to tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue in pluralistic urban societies Al Jumhuri (2023), linking religious teachings with universal values such as justice and human dignity. Despite these contributions, most studies on multicultural Islamic education emphasize pedagogical strategies Mahmudulhassan et al., (2025) or policy dimensions Umar (2024) while neglecting deeper philosophical and epistemological foundations. Multicultural interpretation is frequently framed as a pragmatic tool for social harmony, insufficiently connected to the metaphysical dimensions of Islamic teachings (Firdaus and Suwendi, 2025). This limitation creates the risk of an educational approach that prioritizes social

cohesion at the expense of spiritual depth. At this juncture, Frithjof Schuon's perennialism philosophy becomes particularly relevant. Schuon's concept of the transcendental unity of religions affirms metaphysical unity alongside exoteric and historical diversity Schuon (2014); Sotillos (2020); Khasri and Afif (2025) offering a spiritual horizon capable of grounding both hermeneutics and multicultural interpretation.

His thought provides an epistemological framework that integrates rationality, social context, and spirituality within Islamic education (Mahmudulhassan et al., 2025; Saihu, 2020). A review of existing literature reveals a clear fragmentation: hermeneutics is treated as a critical interpretive method, multicultural interpretation as a socio-pedagogical strategy, and Schuon's perennialism as abstract religious philosophy. Few studies have attempted to integrate these approaches into a unified conceptual framework addressing Islamic education in Indonesia's urban-cultural contexts.

Against this backdrop, Palangka Raya offers a relevant empirical and cultural setting, characterized by relatively harmonious diversity and strong social capital Firdaus and Suwendi (2025) yet still vulnerable to tensions between rigid normativity and shallow multicultural pragmatism. The novelty of this research lies in its explicit synthesis of philosophical hermeneutics and multicultural interpretation within the metaphysical horizon of Frithjof Schuon's perennialism as an epistemological framework for Islamic education in an urban-cultural society. By shifting the discourse from technical pedagogy to the epistemology of religious interpretation, this study seeks to contribute theoretically to contemporary Islamic studies and provide a conceptual foundation for Islamic education that is responsive to urban plurality while preserving its spiritual and metaphysical depth.

Method

This study employs a qualitative research design with a library research type Nassaji (2020); Connaway and Radford (2021) using philosophical and hermeneutic approaches to analyze the epistemological integration of multicultural Abdullah (2022); Jayadi et al., (2022) philosophical hermeneutics Hovey et al., (2022) and Frithjof Schuon's perennialism in the context of Islamic education (Malik, 2021). The qualitative approach was selected to enable in-depth theoretical and conceptual analysis rather than empirical measurement (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Data sources consist of primary texts, including Frithjof Schuon's major works such as *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*, *Understanding Islam*, and *Logic and Transcendence* Schuon (1984); Schuon (2022), as well as key works by contemporary Islamic and hermeneutic thinkers such as Rahman (2024) and Nasr Hamid Zayd (2025); Zayd (2004) and secondary sources in the form of books and peer-reviewed journal articles related to Islamic education, hermeneutics, multicultural interpretation, and urban society. Informants were conceptually determined through authoritative authorship and relevance of texts, while the research instrument was the researcher as the main analytical instrument supported by document analysis guidelines. Data were collected through systematic documentation and literature classification Mengist and Legese (2020) then analyzed through data reduction, interpretive analysis, and philosophical synthesis to construct an integrative epistemological framework. The socio-cultural reality of Palangka Raya was positioned as an analytical context rather than a field research site. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and conceptual validation by referring to authoritative academic literature (Santos et al., 2020).

Results and Discussion

1. Multicultural Interpretation as an Ethical Framework for Islamic Education in the Urban Cultural Community of Palangka Raya

Urban societies are marked by cultural plurality and intensive cross-identity interaction (Rogers and Vertovec, 2020). In Palangka Raya, this condition is reflected in ethnic diversity, such as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, and so on (Rusliana and Halis, 2023). Within this context, the findings indicate that multicultural interpretation functions as an ethical framework that enables Islamic education to remain normatively grounded while socially inclusive. These socio-cultural conditions position Islamic education in a dual role: as a medium for cultivating ethical awareness and as a potential source of tension if conveyed through rigid, ahistorical approaches. The multicultural interpretive approach allows Islamic values such as justice, mutual respect, and compassion to be expressed in relation to the realities of students' lives without sacrificing doctrinal substance. According to Mr. Ahmad, a PAI teacher, he stated that.

Our students come from different cultural backgrounds. If the religious approach is too rigid and black and white, it will be difficult to accept. Islamic values such as justice and mutual respect are easier to understand when they are related to the realities of their daily lives (Interview, October 26, 2025).

This finding suggests that multicultural interpretation has been implicitly practiced as an ethical orientation in learning, even if not always formulated systematically. Such practice aligns with Fazlur Rahman's view that Qur'anic messages must be understood through contextual reading that captures their ethical intent rather than their formal legal expression (Rahman, 2024). In a similar vein, Abu Zayd emphasizes that religious texts function as open discourses interacting dynamically with socio-cultural realities (Zayd, 2004; Zayd, 2025). This was reinforced by an interview with Mr. Nuruddin, a lecturer in Islamic Education in Palangka Raya, who said.

Islam is still taught as a religion that has normative truth. However, the way it is conveyed must take cultural diversity into account. Culturally sensitive interpretations actually make students understand Islam as a blessing, not a threat (Interview, October 20, 2025).

From an educational standpoint, multicultural interpretation thus serves as a bridge between Islamic normativity and urban social reality. This role resonates with Banks' theory of multicultural education, which positions education as an instrument for social justice and recognition of diversity Banks (2015); Banks (2021), and has been shown to be relevant for Islamic education in plural societies (Umar, 2024). However, these findings also reveal limitations. When applied solely as a practical tool for social harmony, multicultural interpretation risks reducing Islamic education to a functional social tool. This is based on an interview with Guru Saiful, a local Islamic education figure.

Sometimes multiculturalism is only used to reduce conflict. If we are not careful, religious education will only become a social tool, rather than spiritual guidance (Interview, October 28, 2025).

This concern echoes Jackson's (2014) critique that plurality-oriented religious education requires a solid theological and philosophical foundation, as well as Schuon's warning against approaches that neglect religion's metaphysical dimension (Schuon, 1984; Sotillos, 2020). Therefore, multicultural interpretation requires epistemological reinforcement to sustain both inclusivity and spiritual depth.

2. Philosophical Hermeneutics in Capturing Religious Messages in the Urban Community of Palangka Raya

Hermeneutics emphasizes dialogical engagement between text, interpreter, and socio-historical context (Akbar, 2020). The findings demonstrate that philosophical hermeneutics plays a crucial role in articulating Islamic teachings within the rational and critical environment of urban Palangka Raya. Literal and ahistorical approaches tend to be insufficient for addressing students' questions and existential concerns in such contexts. Philosophical hermeneutics enables contextual understanding by integrating textual meaning with historical background and the interpreter's horizon (Udeani, 2021). The results of an interview with Mrs. Ani, a lecturer in Islamic Education at a religious university in Palangka Raya, stated that.

Students now ask a lot of questions about the meaning behind the text, not just the law. They want to know the relevance of the verses to the social realities they face. If the lecturer only reads the text without contextual explanation, the discussion stops (Interview, October 26, 2025).

This illustrates hermeneutics as a pedagogical tool that fosters dialogue and critical reflection. This approach resonates with Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons, where understanding emerges through the encounter between tradition and lived experience (Gadamer, 2008; Wahyuningsih, 2025). According to Mrs. Tati, a PAI teacher, she stated that.

Children today live in an urban environment, where they see many different ways of practicing religion. If we teach religion without explaining the context and meaning, they will be confused or even turn away (Interview, October 27, 2025).

Theoretically, these findings align with Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, which combines historical analysis with the extraction of moral principles for contemporary application (Rahman, 2024). Abu Zayd's view of texts as dialogical and historically embedded further supports the need for interpretive openness (Zayd, 2004). As stated by Guru Saiful, a figure in Islamic education, who said that.

Hermeneutics is important, but if it is only used to justify the context, then the basic values will be lost. Islamic education must still have a foundation in faith and spirituality (Interview, October 28, 2025).

This concern is in line with criticism of modern hermeneutics, which tends to be rational and historical in orientation, but leaves little room for the transcendental dimension of the text (Thiselton, 2009; Kögler, 2020; Risser, 2021). In this context, philosophical hermeneutics requires a metaphysical foundation so as not to be trapped in relativism of meaning. Thus, the results of this study indicate that philosophical hermeneutics has significant relevance in Islamic education in urban Palangka Raya because it is able to bridge religious texts with complex social realities. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on its integration with a multicultural ethical framework of interpretation and a metaphysical spiritual foundation. Without such integration, hermeneutics risks being reduced to a tool of social rationalization that loses its transcendental orientation.

3. The Integration of Frithjof Schuon's Perennialism as the Metaphysical Foundation of Urban Islamic Education

Frithjof Schuon's perennialism is grounded in the concept of the transcendental unity of religions, which affirms a shared metaphysical core beneath diverse religious forms (Schuon, 2022). The findings indicate that this perspective offers a vital metaphysical foundation for Islamic education in urban Palangka Raya, where rationalization and pragmatism often dominate religious life. Without metaphysical

grounding, Islamic education risks being reduced to social ethics devoid of spiritual transformation. As stated by Mr. Jai, a lecturer in Islamic Education, that:

Students in cities like Palangka Raya are critical and rational. If Islamic education only focuses on what is halal and haram or social tolerance, they feel empty. They need explanations that touch on the deepest meaning of religion, not just rules or slogans of moderation (Interview, October 20, 2025).

Schuon's distinction between reason and intellect clarifies this issue, as intellect represents the capacity to grasp metaphysical truth beyond discursive reasoning (Schuon, 1993; Khasri and Afif, 2025). Islamic education that relies solely on normative rationality has the potential to lose its spiritual transformative power. Interview data with managers of non-formal Islamic educational institutions in the urban area of Palangka Raya reinforce these findings. According to Mrs. Siti, as the manager of an Islamic educational institution in Palangka Raya City, some urban students show boredom with repetitive and formalistic religious education, as revealed in interviews.

Young people today often say that religion has many rules but little meaning. When we talk to them about the purpose of life, the meaning of worship, and the relationship between humans and God in more depth, they become more interested (Interview, October 30, 2025).

These findings correspond with Schuon's critique of secular modernity, which disconnects knowledge from the sacred (Schuon, 1984; Walker, 2020). In the context of urban Islamic education, perennialism serves to restore religion as a path to knowledge and inner transformation, not merely as a social moral system. The integration of perennialism in Islamic education is not intended to obscure the normative identity of Islam, but rather to deepen its meaning. A prominent figure in Islamic education in Palangka Raya, Guru Saiful emphasized this in an interview:

Perennialism does not equate all religions. Rather, it teaches that behind religious laws and differences, there is a common spiritual goal. This is important so that students do not become narrow-minded fanatics, but also do not lose their faith (Interview, October 28, 2025).

This view aligns with Schuon's distinction between exoteric forms and esoteric essence, as well as Nasr's assertion that Islamic education must integrate rational, ethical, and metaphysical dimensions (Nasr, 2006). Despite its relevance, the findings also reveal practical challenges. Schuon's metaphysical concepts are often perceived as abstract and difficult to operationalize pedagogically, a criticism noted in previous studies (Burckhardt, 2008; Fogelberg and Wang, 2023; R'boul et al., 2024). In this regard, philosophical hermeneutics functions as an epistemological bridge, translating metaphysical insights into interpretive frameworks applicable to curricula and learning practice (Zayd, 2004; Rahman, 1982; Rahman, 2024). Overall, the discussion confirms that the integration of multicultural interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics, and Schuon's perennialism offers a coherent epistemological framework for Islamic education in urban Palangka Raya. This synthesis enables Islamic education to be socially inclusive, intellectually reflective, and spiritually grounded amid the complexities of urban modernity.

Conclusion

This study concludes that multicultural interpretation, philosophical hermeneutics, and Frithjof Schuon's perennialism form an integrative epistemological framework for Islamic education in the cultural urban community of Palangka Raya. Multicultural interpretation functions as an ethical framework that enables universal Islamic values to be articulated contextually within a pluralistic social space without

undermining normative principles, while philosophical hermeneutics serves as a methodological bridge that connects religious texts with the lived realities of urban society through dialogical and reflective interpretation. However, hermeneutics alone risks relativism when detached from a metaphysical foundation; therefore, Schuon's perennialism provides a crucial spiritual and transcendental grounding that preserves the depth and meaning of Islamic teachings amid modern rationality. Through this integration, Islamic education is positioned not merely as an instrument of social adaptation, but as a holistic process that fosters inclusive attitudes, reflective understanding, and profound spiritual consciousness in urban contexts, while acknowledging the need for further empirical research to examine its practical implementation more broadly.

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