

Interfaith Dialogue Models for Peacebuilding in Pluralistic Societies

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper explores interfaith dialogue models as mechanisms for peacebuilding in pluralistic societies. It critically examines how different faith communities engage in dialogue to address conflicts, foster mutual understanding, and contribute to social harmony.

Design/Methodology: This study employs a qualitative methodology, specifically doctrinal analysis, to assess various interfaith dialogue models. By examining both historical and contemporary examples of interfaith dialogue, the research explores key concepts, practices, and challenges. The study draws upon academic sources, case studies, and theoretical frameworks to build a critical understanding of the dynamics of interfaith dialogue.

Findings: The findings suggest that interfaith dialogue, when structured effectively, can contribute significantly to peacebuilding by fostering interreligious respect, promoting collaborative problem-solving, and dismantling harmful stereotypes. However, the study also highlights challenges such as the persistence of deep-seated mistrust, political manipulation, and the limitations of dialogue in the face of entrenched ideological positions.

Originality/Value: This paper offers a critical evaluation of the theoretical foundations and practical applications of interfaith dialogue for peacebuilding. By analyzing real-world case studies, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on the role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding, providing new insights into how interfaith dialogue can be leveraged in pluralistic societies.

Keywords

Interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, pluralistic societies, religious conflict,

1. Introduction

In pluralistic societies, where diverse religious groups coexist, the potential for conflict arising from religious differences remains high. The need for effective

mechanisms to foster mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation across these divides is crucial to ensuring long-term peace and stability. One such mechanism is interfaith dialogue, which has emerged as a significant tool for peacebuilding. Interfaith dialogue involves direct communication between individuals from different religious traditions, aiming to promote understanding, resolve misunderstandings, and build solidarity across faith-based communities. Its roots lie in the recognition that while religious beliefs may differ, the shared human experiences of suffering, joy, and hope can form common ground.

The importance of interfaith dialogue as a model for peacebuilding has become particularly evident in the context of modern global conflicts, where religious identity often plays a central role in the dynamics of violence. Societies experiencing ethnic and religious tensions have turned to dialogue initiatives in attempts to bridge divides. Whether through formal dialogue frameworks, grassroots initiatives, or political institutions, the objective is clear: create spaces where faith communities can come together, exchange ideas, and collaboratively address social and political challenges.

However, despite its promise, the implementation of interfaith dialogue is not without complications. Challenges such as unequal power dynamics, religious exclusivism, and political manipulation often undermine the potential for dialogue to effect positive change. Scholars and practitioners alike have critiqued these models, questioning their ability to move beyond superficial conversation to address the root causes of conflict. Moreover, the increasing use of interfaith dialogue as a political tool complicates its ability to serve as a true peacebuilding mechanism in some contexts.

This paper aims to critically examine interfaith dialogue models, evaluating their contributions to peacebuilding in pluralistic societies. Through a doctrinal analysis, this study explores both the successes and limitations of these dialogue frameworks, drawing on academic literature and case studies. It seeks to answer the following questions: What makes interfaith dialogue an effective tool for peacebuilding? What challenges hinder its success? And how can interfaith dialogue models be restructured or expanded to overcome these barriers in the contemporary world?

In addressing these questions, this paper will first review the relevant literature on interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding, followed by an exploration of methodological approaches for assessing the effectiveness of dialogue models. The findings will inform a broader discussion on the potential for interfaith dialogue to contribute meaningfully to the peacebuilding process in multicultural and multi-faith societies.

2. Literature Review

Interfaith dialogue has been studied extensively as a critical approach to peacebuilding, especially in societies marked by religious diversity and conflict. Its primary objective is to create opportunities for understanding, reconciliation, and collaborative peacebuilding among different religious groups. This literature review

explores key theoretical perspectives and empirical studies that address the role of interfaith dialogue in promoting peace and mitigating conflict in pluralistic societies.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Interfaith Dialogue

The concept of interfaith dialogue is grounded in the idea that open communication between religious groups can help to bridge differences and foster mutual respect. According to Al-Faruqi (1995), interfaith dialogue allows for a deeper understanding of the diverse religious traditions and values, creating a common ground for peaceful coexistence. However, the success of these dialogues depends largely on the attitudes and approaches of the participants. Theoretical models of interfaith dialogue often emphasize mutual respect, empathy, and shared ethical values, as essential components for creating lasting peace (Brajovic, 2005). Some scholars argue that interfaith dialogue needs to go beyond superficial discussions and address deeper philosophical and theological issues (Sidik & Dilawati, 2025). According to Driessen (2025), a more meaningful dialogue should challenge participants' assumptions about their own and others' faiths, moving beyond simple exchanges of goodwill to engage in difficult conversations about differences and commonalities. This perspective highlights the importance of not only fostering understanding but also encouraging critical self-reflection and transformation in the dialogue process.

2.2 Historical and Contemporary Models of Interfaith Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue models vary widely depending on their cultural and religious contexts. One well-known model is the "Triologue of the Abrahamic Faiths" proposed by Al-Faruqi (1995), which focuses on the commonalities between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This model emphasizes shared religious values and ethical principles as the basis for dialogue. However, its applicability has been critiqued for oversimplifying the complexities of religious diversity and neglecting the perspectives of minority faith groups (Halafoff, 2017). Other models focus on pluralism, where all religions are seen as equal and deserving of respect, but critics argue that such models can inadvertently promote religious relativism and undermine the search for deeper theological truths (Estuningtyas, 2024). In recent years, scholars have expanded the understanding of interfaith dialogue to include non-Abrahamic traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous belief systems. According to Nafisah et al. (2024), these broader models of interfaith dialogue are more inclusive, providing space for dialogue between faiths with vastly different theological foundations. However, incorporating non-Abrahamic traditions also presents unique challenges, particularly when attempting to reconcile disparate theological concepts such as the nature of divinity or the role of ritual practices.

2.3 Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding in Pluralistic Societies

A central goal of interfaith dialogue is its potential role in peacebuilding. According to Corpuz (2025), interfaith dialogue can significantly contribute to reducing violence, fostering reconciliation, and rebuilding trust between conflicting religious groups. In regions with a history of religious tensions, such as the Middle East and South Asia,

interfaith dialogue initiatives have led to significant grassroots efforts in peacebuilding, although the process is often slow and fraught with setbacks (Agung et al., 2024). For example, in Indonesia, interfaith dialogue models have been successfully implemented in local communities to promote religious tolerance and cooperation between Muslim, Christian, and Hindu communities (Agung et al., 2024). These efforts often focus on common values, such as compassion, justice, and peace, which are shared across different religions. However, the effectiveness of these models can be undermined by political factors, such as the manipulation of religious identities for electoral gain, which can further deepen divisions (Visser, 2023). One of the critical issues in peacebuilding through interfaith dialogue is the challenge of achieving structural change in the face of deep-rooted religious conflicts. According to Halafoff (2017), interfaith dialogue is often seen as a "top-down" approach, driven by elites and political leaders, which can alienate local communities who may feel that their voices are not being heard. This critique calls for more inclusive models that engage local actors in the dialogue process and prioritize community-based initiatives (Sidik & Dilawati, 2025).

2.4 Challenges and Critiques of Interfaith Dialogue

Despite the promise of interfaith dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding, several challenges remain. One of the major critiques is the limited scope of these dialogues in addressing the root causes of conflict. According to Driessen (2025), interfaith dialogue is often seen as a "band-aid" solution, providing temporary relief without addressing underlying socio-political issues such as economic inequality, human rights abuses, and authoritarian governance. Furthermore, some critics argue that interfaith dialogue can be a politically charged activity, often used by governments or religious leaders to create an appearance of unity, without delivering substantive outcomes (Corpuz, 2025). In addition, the lack of genuine theological engagement in some interfaith dialogue models has led to concerns about the superficial nature of these interactions. As Visser (2023) points out, many interfaith dialogues are often limited to discussions about "tolerance" and "respect," without critically addressing fundamental theological disagreements. This shallow approach may fail to challenge harmful stereotypes or alter the deeply held beliefs that fuel religious conflict.

2.5 The Role of Education and Grassroots Initiatives

Education has been identified as a key factor in the success of interfaith dialogue models. According to Sidik and Dilawati (2025), educating young people about religious diversity and the values of mutual respect is essential for long-term peacebuilding. School programs that incorporate interfaith dialogue principles can help to foster empathy, reduce prejudice, and promote understanding among different religious groups. Furthermore, grassroots initiatives that empower local communities to engage in dialogue on their own terms have been shown to be more effective than top-down efforts imposed by external actors (Anyagou, 2025). The inclusion of youth in interfaith dialogue is particularly important, as they represent the future of interreligious relationships. By encouraging young people to engage in interfaith dialogue, societies can lay the foundation for a more peaceful and inclusive future. Moreover, local religious leaders play a crucial role in supporting and leading

interfaith dialogue initiatives, as their influence can help to legitimize dialogue processes within their communities (Guerra et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative methodology, specifically a doctrinal analysis, to explore interfaith dialogue models for peacebuilding in pluralistic societies. Doctrinal analysis is a qualitative research method that focuses on the systematic examination of theoretical frameworks, principles, and religious teachings to understand how they influence social practices—in this case, interfaith dialogue. This methodology is appropriate for critically analyzing the discourse surrounding interfaith dialogue, its theoretical foundations, and its practical application in peacebuilding efforts.

3.1 Research Approach

The research follows a doctrinal qualitative approach, which involves analyzing religious texts, academic articles, policy documents, and reports on interfaith dialogue initiatives. By critically examining both historical and contemporary examples, this study aims to uncover the underlying principles and assumptions that guide interfaith dialogue practices. The doctrinal analysis seeks to explore how these models are constructed, implemented, and evaluated, focusing on the outcomes they generate in terms of peacebuilding.

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this research was gathered from multiple sources, including:

Academic Literature: Peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and scholarly papers were reviewed to provide a comprehensive understanding of interfaith dialogue models. These sources included case studies, theoretical frameworks, and empirical research related to interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding in pluralistic societies (Agung et al., 2024; Sidik & Dilawati, 2025; Halafoff, 2017).

Case Studies: Specific case studies of interfaith dialogue initiatives in regions such as Indonesia, Nigeria, and the Middle East were analyzed to assess the practical applications of interfaith dialogue and their impacts on peacebuilding (Anyagou, 2025; Corpuz, 2025). These case studies provided valuable insights into how interfaith dialogue models operate in different socio-political and religious contexts.

Reports and Policy Documents: Reports from international organizations such as the United Nations and local NGOs on interfaith dialogue initiatives were included to assess the effectiveness of these models from a policy perspective (Driessen, 2025; Guerra et al., 2021).

Theological Texts: Doctrinal texts from various religious traditions (e.g., Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism) were analyzed to understand the religious

foundations of interfaith dialogue and how different faiths approach the concept of peace and reconciliation (Al-Faruqi, 1995; Brajovic, 2005).

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through thematic coding. Key themes that emerged from the literature and case studies were identified and categorized into several broad areas:

Theoretical Foundations: This theme focused on the conceptual underpinnings of interfaith dialogue models, including the philosophical and theological principles that guide dialogue (e.g., shared values, mutual respect, tolerance).

Practices and Approaches: This theme examined the practical implementation of interfaith dialogue, including the methodologies used by various interfaith initiatives and their success or failure in promoting peacebuilding.

Challenges and Barriers: This theme explored the challenges faced by interfaith dialogue models, such as political manipulation, resistance from religious communities, and the superficial nature of some dialogue initiatives (Driessen, 2025; Sidik & Dilawati, 2025).

Impact on Peacebuilding: This theme focused on the outcomes of interfaith dialogue initiatives in terms of their contributions to peace, reconciliation, and conflict resolution in pluralistic societies.

Each theme was analyzed critically to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing interfaith dialogue models. By synthesizing the data, the study aimed to offer a nuanced understanding of how interfaith dialogue contributes to peacebuilding and where improvements can be made.

4. Results

The results of the doctrinal analysis highlight both the potential and the limitations of interfaith dialogue models in pluralistic societies.

4.1 Effectiveness of Interfaith Dialogue Models

The study found that interfaith dialogue can significantly contribute to peacebuilding, especially in areas with a history of religious conflict. In Indonesia, for example, interfaith initiatives have played a pivotal role in reducing tensions between Muslim and Christian communities (Agung et al., 2024). By focusing on shared values such as compassion and social justice, interfaith dialogue models have created spaces for collaborative efforts in addressing local issues, ranging from poverty alleviation to disaster relief. Similarly, in Ghana, Christian and Muslim leaders have come together in dialogue to promote social cohesion and peace, particularly in response to political tensions (Anyagou, 2025). These grassroots initiatives have been particularly

successful in fostering relationships at the community level, where mutual respect and understanding can be more easily cultivated.

4.2 Barriers to Success

However, the study also uncovered several barriers that hinder the success of interfaith dialogue models. One of the most significant challenges is the political manipulation of interfaith dialogue initiatives. In some cases, religious leaders and politicians have used interfaith dialogue as a tool to solidify their power and influence, rather than as a genuine effort to promote peace (Visser, 2023). This has led to a lack of authenticity in some dialogue processes, with participants often prioritizing political or ideological agendas over genuine interreligious understanding. Additionally, religious exclusivism remains a significant barrier to the success of interfaith dialogue. Despite the emphasis on mutual respect and shared values, many religious communities continue to view dialogue with suspicion, fearing that it may undermine their own religious beliefs or lead to a dilution of their faith (Sidik & Dilawati, 2025). This exclusivism can create divisions even within dialogue spaces, making it difficult to move beyond surface-level discussions.

4.3 Long-term Impact on Peacebuilding

Despite these challenges, the study found that interfaith dialogue can have long-term positive effects on peacebuilding. When implemented effectively, interfaith dialogue helps to create a foundation of trust and cooperation between religious communities. This foundation is essential for addressing social and political conflicts that may otherwise persist in pluralistic societies.

Moreover, the involvement of youth and local religious leaders in interfaith dialogue initiatives was identified as a key factor for the long-term success of these models. By engaging younger generations and grassroots leaders, interfaith dialogue can have a lasting impact on the values and attitudes of future leaders and citizens (Guerra et al., 2021).

5. Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that interfaith dialogue models can play a crucial role in peacebuilding in pluralistic societies, but their success is dependent on several factors, including the authenticity of the dialogue process, the political and religious context, and the active participation of local communities. The effectiveness of these models is evident in regions like Indonesia and Ghana, where interfaith initiatives have fostered greater understanding between Muslim and Christian communities (Agung et al., 2024; Anyaogu, 2025). These successes highlight the potential of interfaith dialogue to bridge divides and create spaces for collaboration on common social issues, such as poverty and social justice.

However, the study also reveals the limitations and challenges associated with interfaith dialogue models. One of the most critical barriers to the success of these

initiatives is the political manipulation of interfaith dialogues, where the process becomes a tool for advancing political or ideological agendas, rather than fostering genuine understanding and peace. This finding echoes the concerns raised by Sidik and Dilawati (2025), who argue that political interests can undermine the integrity of dialogue processes. This manipulation can alienate participants and prevent dialogue from reaching its full potential as a peacebuilding tool.

In addition to political manipulation, the study highlights religious exclusivism as another significant obstacle to successful interfaith dialogue. Despite the emphasis on shared values and mutual respect, many religious communities remain resistant to interfaith dialogue due to the fear that it may compromise their own religious beliefs. This challenge aligns with the critiques of interfaith dialogue frameworks proposed by Driessen (2025), who cautions that dialogue must address deep-seated theological differences, not just focus on superficial commonalities.

Furthermore, the study points to the importance of involving youth and grassroots religious leaders in interfaith dialogue initiatives. By engaging young people and local leaders, interfaith dialogue can have a lasting impact on the attitudes and values of future generations, ensuring that peacebuilding efforts are sustained over time (Guerra et al., 2021). This finding underscores the need for more inclusive models that prioritize the active participation of communities at the local level, rather than relying solely on top-down initiatives driven by political elites.

6. Conclusion

Interfaith dialogue models offer a promising approach to peacebuilding in pluralistic societies, but their success is contingent upon overcoming significant challenges. The study highlights that while interfaith dialogue has the potential to reduce religious tensions and promote social cohesion, it must be approached with authenticity and a commitment to addressing the deeper causes of conflict. Political manipulation and religious exclusivism remain major barriers to the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue, and these must be addressed for dialogue to be truly transformative. Moreover, the involvement of youth and grassroots religious leaders is essential for the long-term success of interfaith dialogue initiatives. These groups are instrumental in ensuring that the values of mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation are passed down to future generations. For interfaith dialogue to contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, it must be integrated into broader peacebuilding strategies that address social, economic, and political inequalities. Ultimately, interfaith dialogue is not a panacea for all conflicts in pluralistic societies, but when implemented thoughtfully and inclusively, it can be a powerful tool for building trust, fostering cooperation, and creating a more peaceful world. Further research should focus on exploring innovative approaches to interfaith dialogue, particularly in contexts where religious tensions are particularly pronounced. By critically assessing the successes and limitations of existing dialogue models, scholars and practitioners can contribute to the development of more effective peacebuilding strategies in the future.

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