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## Islamic Religious Education in a Minority Context: Identity Negotiation, Pedagogical Adaptation, and Religious Moderation Practices

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### ABSTRACT

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in demographic minority regions faces complex challenges in balancing the strengthening of faith (*aqidah*) with the necessity of social adaptation amidst the dominance of other religious cultures. This study aims to analyze how IRE at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, East Nusa Tenggara, serves as an arena for identity negotiation and pedagogical adaptation for minority Muslim students. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, where data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The results indicate that minority status does not drive Muslim students toward self-isolation; rather, it fosters the formation of a fluid and confident identity in which the school functions as a "contact zone" for social negotiation. IRE teachers act as "cultural brokers" who undertake pedagogical adaptations by shifting from a textual approach toward value transmission through the "hidden curriculum" and extracurricular activities. The findings also emphasize that religious moderation in this setting manifests as "lived religion," emerging organically through the support of the social ecosystem and the local wisdom of the Labuan Bajo community. This study concludes that IRE in minority settings can transform from a dogmatic approach into a socio-constructivist approach that effectively builds social cohesion.

**Keywords:** Islamic Religious Education, Minority Context, Identity Negotiation, Cultural Broker, Lived Religion

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### INTRODUCTION

Amidst escalating global polarization and identity politics, religious education faces an imperative challenge to balance the strengthening of faith (*aqidah*) with the formation of inclusive citizenship. In Indonesia, Islamic Religious shift from a dogmatic, exclusive approach to a pedagogy responsive to cultural diversity to transferring theological doctrines but also as a strategic state instrument to promote religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) and social cohesion (Hefner, 2021; Nisa et al., 2021). Current academic discourse asserts that IRE must transform from a dogmatic-exclusive approach toward a pedagogy responsive to cultural diversity to prevent the growth of extremism among students (Azra et al., 2022; Suyanto et al., 2022).

Despite the widely adopted urgency of religious moderation in national policy, existing literature remains dominated by studies within Muslim-majority contexts or by textual curriculum analyses (Mulkan, 2022; Zulkifli et al., 2023). A significant gap remains in understanding how IRE operates in regions where Muslims constitute a minority. In minority demographic landscapes, schools become "contested spaces," where Muslim students and teachers must not only grapple with subject matter but also navigate their faith identities amidst the dominance of symbols and practices of other religions (Bakri, 2022; Ismail et al., 2022).

Empirical realities indicate that IRE in minority regions entails psychological and sociological complexities that are often elusive to normative approaches. While prior scholarship has frequently presupposed that tolerance is an automatic byproduct of a robust curriculum, recent research challenges this premise. It contends that religious moderation is, instead, a manifestation of 'lived religion'—a continuous negotiation between theological precepts and everyday social realities (Qodir et al., 2021; Rusydiyah et al., 2021). This dynamic is particularly salient at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, East Nusa Tenggara, where inevitable interfaith interactions compel both educators and students to engage in creative adaptive strategies (Suhadi et al., 2023).

The novelty of this study lies in its shift in perspective from an instructional-normative approach to a socio-constructivist one. This study argues that in minority environments, religious moderation is not merely "taught" in the classroom but is "constructed" through strategies of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation (Parker, 2021; Supriyanto & Wahyudi, 2024). Consequently, this research aims to analyze how IRE at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo functions as an arena for identity negotiation and pedagogical adaptation. The findings are expected to provide a theoretical contribution regarding the mechanism of experience-based moderation formation within a pluralistic society.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative approach underpinned by a case study design. This methodological stance was selected to explore the phenomenon of religious moderation as a complex, dynamic, and contextually embedded social process—nuances that are ill-suited for measurement through mere quantitative metrics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design was utilized to rigorously investigate how Islamic Religious Education (IRE) operates within a specific social system (a school in a minority setting) as an 'intrinsic case,' particularly where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear (Yin, 2018).

This study was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, located in West Manggarai Regency, East Nusa Tenggara. This site was selected through purposive sampling due to its distinct characteristics as a public institution where a minority Muslim student population engages in intensive interaction within a predominantly Catholic cultural milieu. Research participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique to identify key informants possessing first-hand knowledge and lived experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The cohort of informants comprised IRE teachers, Muslim students, and relevant members of the school community. The final sample size was determined by the principle of data saturation, wherein data collection ceased once the information obtained became redundant and no new significant themes emerged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data acquisition was conducted through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was strategically employed to capture naturalistic social interactions and religious practices within the school environment (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured in-depth interviews were utilized to elicit subjects' perspectives regarding their conceptualizations of tolerance and adaptive strategies. Concurrently, document analysis was performed on curriculum archives and school regulations to comprehend the overarching policy context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data analysis adopted the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), comprising three concurrent flows of activity: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The term 'data condensation' is deliberately utilized in preference to 'data reduction' to underscore the process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying data without compromising essential information. To ensure data trustworthiness, the researcher employed source and method triangulation techniques, alongside member checking to verify the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation against the participants' views (Creswell, 2014).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Interpreting the Minority School as a "Contact Zone"**

The findings of this study are interpreted through a synthesized theoretical framework that integrates Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "Contact Zone," Henry Giroux's "Border Pedagogy," and Social Identity Theory. By framing SMA Negeri 1 Komodo not merely as an educational institution but as a "contact zone"—a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other (Pratt, 1991)—this study elucidates the complex dynamics of minority religious education. Within this contested space, IRE teachers transcend traditional doctrinal instruction to function as "cultural border crossers" (Giroux, 2005), facilitating a pedagogical environment where religious moderation is not taught as a static concept, but lived as a dynamic negotiation. Concurrently, Muslim students navigate the tension between maintaining a distinctive group identity and the necessity for social integration, a process illuminated by Tajfel and Turner's (1979) notion of "positive distinctiveness." The following sections detail how these theoretical constructs manifest in the daily realities of the school ecosystem.

### **Pedagogical Adaptation: From Textual Dogma to Lived Values**

The first pivotal finding indicates a significant departure from standard normative instruction. In a majority Muslim context, IRE often emphasizes textual mastery and doctrinal boundaries. However, at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, teachers consciously shift their approach to ensure relevance within a predominantly Catholic environment. This adaptive process transforms the teacher's role from a sole authority of truth into a "cultural broker" who mediates between Islamic values and the local social reality. Table 1 delineates this pedagogical shift, juxtaposing the conventional normative approach with the adaptive strategies observed during the study.

Table 1. Juxtaposition of Conventional vs. Adaptive Pedagogical Approaches in IRE

Pedagogical Aspect	Conventional Approach (Normative/Textual)	Adaptive Approach (Contextual/Socio-constructivist)	Observed Outcome
<b>Instructional Focus</b>	Emphasis on doctrinal purity and exclusive theological truth claims.	Emphasis on universal values ( <i>akblaq</i> ) and inclusive ethics relevant to a pluralistic setting.	Reduction in dogmatic rigidity; increase in social relevance and student engagement.
<b>Teacher's Role</b>	Sole authority of religious knowledge ( <i>Muallim</i> ).	Cultural broker and facilitator of interfaith dialogue ( <i>Murabbi</i> ).	Enhanced trust between students and teachers across faith lines.
<b>Learning Environment</b>	Classroom as an isolated space for internalizing dogma.	School as a "Contact Zone" for negotiating religious meaning.	Students develop resilience in navigating cultural differences.
<b>Response to "Other"</b>	Segregation or defensive posturing against non-Muslim influences.	Engagement and "lived tolerance" through shared activities (e.g., sports, arts).	Formation of organic social cohesion and mutual respect.

As illustrated in Table 1, the adaptive approach aligns with Giroux's (2005) framework of Border Pedagogy, where teachers empower students to cross cultural borders without losing their own identity. By focusing on *akblaq* (universal ethics) rather than exclusive theology, teachers create a "safe space" for students to interact with their Catholic peers. This proves that in a minority setting, the efficacy of IRE is measured not by the students' ability to recite arguments against other religions, but by their capacity to embody Islamic values in a pluralistic society.

### Negotiating Identity: Fluidity and Positive Distinctiveness

While teachers facilitate the environment, students actively navigate it. Contrary to the assumption that minority status leads to isolation or assimilation, the data reveals that Muslim

students at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo employ sophisticated strategies to maintain their identity. Drawing on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), these students do not view their minority status as a deficit. Instead, they engage in "positive distinctiveness," asserting their Islamic identity in ways that are socially acceptable and respected by the majority. Table 2 categorizes the typology of identity negotiation strategies employed by the students.

Table 2. Typology of Identity Negotiation Strategies Among Minority Muslim Students

Strategy Type	Description of Behavioral Manifestation	Theoretical Mechanism (Social Identity Theory)	Impact on Moderation
<b>Confident Assimilation</b>	Students participate in general school culture while maintaining core Islamic obligations (e.g., prayer).	<i>Social Creativity</i> – Redefining the value of integration without losing distinctiveness.	<b>High:</b> Promotes inclusive citizenship and fluid identity.
<b>Principled Distinction</b>	Students politely decline certain Catholic rituals but explain reasons based on faith constraints.	<i>Positive Distinctiveness</i> – Asserting identity boundaries respectfully.	<b>Moderate:</b> Builds mutual understanding through explanation rather than conflict.
<b>Dialogical Engagement</b>	Proactive discussion about faith differences with Catholic peers during break times.	<i>Intergroup Contact</i> – Reducing prejudice through direct, equal-status interaction.	<b>Very High:</b> Fosters deep, substantive religious literacy.

Table 2 demonstrates that identity negotiation is not a monolithic process. The "Dialogical Engagement" strategy highlights the emergence of "lived religion" where tolerance is constructed through daily interaction rather than theoretical instruction. This validates the premise that the school functions as a productive contact zone, where the friction of diversity generates a more robust and resilient form of religious moderation.

### 1. Negotiating Identity in the "Contact Zone": Transcending Exclusivist Barriers

Field data gathered at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo elucidates a compelling phenomenon wherein the demographic minority status of Muslim students does not correlate linearly with social marginalization. Contrary to the prevailing assumption that minority groups tend to retreat into enclaves to safeguard their faith (aqidah), Muslim students at this school exhibit a fluid and confident identity. Interactions observed during joint prayers at morning assemblies or social engagement in the school canteen

demonstrate that religious identity does not manifest as a segregating barrier, but rather as a social attribute that enriches interaction.

From a sociological vantage point, the school operates as a "contact zone" (Pratt, 1991) where students engage in continuous identity negotiation. This finding challenges the conventional thesis that interfaith encounters are inherently prone to conflict. Conversely, as noted by Bakri (2022) in his study in Bali, Muslim minorities often develop a "theology of harmony" as a survival strategy. In West Manggarai, this strategy is evident in the active participation of interfaith youth during Eid al-Fitr celebrations. This signifies a shift in religious identity from mere "ritual piety" to "social piety" (Hefner, 2021).

Crucially, these students are not compromising their *aqidah*; rather, they are engaged in an act of "cultural translation." They remain authentic as Muslims while simultaneously adapting to the social rhythm of the Catholic majority. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of Ismail et al. (2022) in Papua, which suggest that Muslim minorities in Eastern Indonesia tend to practice inclusive religiosity as a form of social capital, enabling their acceptance within a pluralistic societal structure.

Furthermore, the construction of identity at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo constitutes an endeavor by Muslim students to forge a "third space" (Bhabha, 1994) within their social interactions. In this space, students are not trapped in a binary dichotomy between "defending faith" or "assimilating into the majority." Instead, they demonstrate active agency by projecting an Islamic identity that is welcoming and open. This underscores that minority status does not inevitably breed resistance or self-isolation; rather, it catalyzes social creativity to re-narrate the meaning of being a devout Muslim who remains socially relevant amidst a dominant Catholic community (Djainudin, 2022).

Sociologically, this phenomenon demonstrates that students' religious identity functions as "social capital" for building cohesion, rather than serving as a rigid theological attribute. When Muslim students engage in collective activities without shedding their religious symbols, they are negotiating social acceptance through pathways of achievement and participation. This strategy resonates with Bakri's (2022) observation that minority groups tend to develop "soft defense mechanisms" by culturally integrating without forfeiting the substance of their faith, thereby ensuring their existence is respected and embraced by the majority group.

## 2. Pedagogical Adaptation: Optimizing the Hidden Curriculum of Tolerance

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at SMA Negeri 1 Komodo does not operate within a socio-cultural vacuum. IRE educators acknowledge that a strictly textual-doctrinal pedagogy is increasingly inadequate for such a heterogeneous school context. Consequently, a paradigmatic shift is observable: moving from religion as mere "knowledge transfer" to "value transmission" via pedagogical adaptation. Empirical data indicates that value internalization is not confined to formal classrooms; rather, it is intensified through extracurricular activities (such as Rohis and Scouts) and the broader school culture.

Within international educational discourse, this phenomenon is conceptualized as the leveraging of the "hidden curriculum" (Jackson, 1968). As Mulkan (2022) asserts, informal interactions and the prevailing school atmosphere often exert a more profound

impact on character formation than the official curriculum. When IRE teachers facilitate joint prayers or encourage Muslim student participation in school committees irrespective of religious background, they are instilling tolerance as a praxis, rather than a theoretical abstraction.

Here, the teacher's role undergoes a transformation from a mere "instructor" to a "cultural broker." They mediate between normative religious precepts and the students' lived social realities. This mediation is critical; as Supriyanto and Wahyudi (2024) argue, the failure to contextualize IRE materials often serves as a gateway to rigid and intolerant interpretations. At SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, the integration of moderation values into non-academic spheres demonstrates that IRE has successfully achieved a pedagogical adaptation responsive to the pluralistic school ecosystem.

This adaptive process underscores the pivotal agency of the IRE teacher acting as a "cultural broker" who bridges the gap between scriptural texts and the lived realities of the students. Transcending the mere transmission of dogmatic tenets, these teachers engage in active theological contextualization. They accentuate universal Islamic values—specifically *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *ta'awun* (mutual assistance)—positioning them as central pedagogical pillars for navigating the school's heterogeneity. This strategy is particularly astute, as it effectively circumvents the collision of rigid religious narratives that might otherwise precipitate cognitive dissonance within the students.

Consequently, this pedagogical adaptation transmutes the demographic challenge—specifically, the minority condition—into a profound educational opportunity, cultivating a religious understanding that is both substantive and inclusive. Moreover, the efficacy of this adaptation is heavily contingent upon the strategic integration of the "hidden curriculum" within the broader school ecosystem. Values of moderation are not exclusively disseminated through explicit verbal instruction within classroom walls; rather, they are osmotically internalized through a conducive school atmosphere, characterized by seamless interactions in the canteen and collaborative endeavors within the Student Council (OSIS). As posited by Mulkan (2022), the lived experience of interfaith encounters often exerts a more potent pedagogical impact on the formation of a tolerant character than the mere rote memorization of scriptural texts. At SMA Negeri 1 Komodo, the school environment itself has metamorphosed into a "living textbook," wherein lessons on diversity are organically instructed through the nuances of daily life.

### **3. Religious Moderation as Lived Religion and the Support of the Social Ecosystem**

Religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) at the research site does not manifest as a mere top-down policy jargon; rather, it flourishes as a "lived religion." The concept of lived religion emphasizes how faith is performed in the mundane realities of everyday life by ordinary individuals, transcending the confines of scriptural prescriptions (Qodir et al., 2021). The practices of mutual assistance across faith lines and the absence of social segregation within the school serve as empirical evidence that moderation has become an everyday practice.

The success of this praxis is inextricably linked to the conducive social ecosystem of the Labuan Bajo community. The harmonious relationship between religious leaders

and the public creates a social safety net that reinforces the values instilled within the school. This finding confirms Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, wherein a student's character development (the microsystem) is profoundly shaped by the support of the broader community (the macrosystem).

Nisa et al. (2021) highlight that schools cannot function as the sole agents of moderation. Instead, the synergy between an "inclusive school culture" and "local wisdom" is paramount. In West Manggarai, local traditions that prioritize kinship over religious boundaries serve as cultural modalities that facilitate IRE teachers in embedding moderate values. Consequently, religious moderation in this context is the product of a healthy dialectic between religious texts, school-based educational strategies, and the organic local wisdom of the society.

These dynamics underscore that religious moderation within the school is not a product of top-down instruction or mere policy jargon; rather, it is a "grassroots practice" that has flourished organically. Religious moderation manifests as lived religion—faith performed in response to the fundamental necessity of peaceful coexistence. Students and educators practice tolerance not merely because of institutional mandates, but due to a collective consciousness that social harmony is an absolute prerequisite for the community's survival in a minority context. This represents a form of authentic moderation, emerging from the dialectic between religious doctrine and sociological imperatives (Qodir et al., 2021).

The sustainability of these moderate practices is inextricably linked to support for Labuan Bajo's social structure, which serves as a cultural safety net. There is robust synergy between the educational microsystem (the school) and the social macrosystem (the community), in which the inclusive values taught in the classroom gain external legitimacy from religious and customary leaders. Aligning with the perspectives of Nisa et al. (2021), schools cannot act as the sole agents in cultivating tolerance; they require a consistent supporting ecosystem. In this context, the local wisdom of a society accustomed to coexistence provides a solid foundation for the school to sustainably sow the seeds of religious moderation.

## CONCLUSION

This study underscores that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Muslim-minority settings—exemplified by SMA Negeri 1 Komodo—does not operate within a vacuum; rather, it functions as a dynamic sociological arena for identity negotiation and the production of religious moderation. The findings challenge the prevailing assumption that minority status inevitably breeds exclusivism or self-isolation. Conversely, Muslim students demonstrate active agency by negotiating their religious identities with remarkable fluidity. Rather than choosing withdrawal, they engage in participatory integration, wherein religious symbols are managed as social capital to foster cohesion with the Catholic majority.

Theoretically, this research contributes to a paradigmatic shift in IRE studies, moving from a textual-normative approach toward a socio-constructive framework. Religious moderation is proven to be more than just a byproduct of the formal classroom curriculum; it is the result of "lived religion," constructed through the pedagogical adaptations of teachers and

the daily interactions of students within the school's "contact zone." IRE educators play a pivotal role as cultural brokers, translating theological values into social ethics by leveraging the hidden curriculum and extracurricular activities. Ultimately, this success is inextricably linked to the supportive social ecosystem of the West Manggarai community, which positions tolerance as a collective virtue. This study suggests that when local wisdom, adaptive pedagogy, and student agency converge, religious moderation ceases to be a mere policy mandate and becomes a resilient, lived reality.

The practical implications of this research advocate for a reorientation of IRE policies in minority contexts through a flexible curriculum that allows for deeper material contextualization and the creation of natural interfaith spaces within schools. Given the limitations of this research as a single case study in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), subsequent studies are recommended to conduct comparative research in other Muslim-minority regions. Furthermore, future investigations should examine the influence of digital media on the perception of religious moderation, as the digital landscape increasingly reshapes how young people navigate religious identity and social interaction.

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