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Intersectional Identity and Symbolic Marginalization of Ethnic Minority Women in Islamic Education

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Abstract

General Background: Multicultural Islamic education is expected to accommodate social diversity, justice, and recognition of students' multiple identities. **Specific Background:** Female students from ethnic minority groups may encounter unequal learning experiences arising from intersections among gender, ethnicity, religion, and social position within multicultural schools. **Knowledge Gap:** Previous studies commonly examine gender, ethnicity, and Islamic education separately, while Indonesian multicultural education research remains concentrated on policy and curriculum rather than the subjective experiences of ethnic minority female students. **Aims:** This qualitative case study examined how intersecting identities shape learning experiences and how multicultural schools in Pekalongan Regency implement inclusive practices, using participatory observation, in-depth interviews, recording, and focus group discussions with 18 informants. **Results:** The findings revealed symbolic exclusion in learning, majority-culture dominance within the hidden curriculum, and identity stereotypes affecting student participation. Students negotiated these conditions through social adaptation and strengthened religiosity as social capital, while an ambivalence remained between normative multicultural values and pedagogical practice. **Novelty:** Applying an intersectionality perspective demonstrates how gender, ethnicity, religiosity, and educational settings collectively generate symbolic power relations and identity negotiation in a local Indonesian context. **Implications:** The findings support intersectional pedagogical transformation, inclusive curriculum development, teacher professional development, and social justice-oriented educational policy.

Highlights:

- Learning settings contained exclusion, majority-culture dominance, and identity stereotypes.
- Female students negotiated identity through social adaptation and strengthened religiosity.
- Normative multicultural values remained ambivalent against everyday pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Islamic Education, Ethnic Minority, Multicultural Schools.

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Introduction

Islamic education in the era of a multicultural society no longer functions solely as a medium for transmitting religious knowledge, but also as a space for developing social awareness, justice, and recognition of students' diverse identities [1]. In the context of Indonesia as a multiethnic and multicultural country, Islamic schools face the challenge of creating an inclusive educational environment for all students regardless of ethnic, gender, or socioeconomic backgrounds. Pekalongan Regency, as one of the regions with ethnic diversity—comprising Javanese, Arab, Chinese communities, and other migrant groups—exhibits complex social dynamics in the practice of multicultural education [2]. On the other hand, women from ethnic minority groups often experience unequal learning experiences due to the intersection of gender, cultural identity, and social position that mutually influence one another.

The phenomenon of identity-based discrimination in education remains both a global and national issue. Women from ethnic minority groups are more likely to experience social isolation, cultural stereotyping, marginalization in multicultural educational environments, and restricted academic involvement, according to a 2023 UNESCO study [3]. A 2022 Setara Institute survey in Indonesia found that intolerance and identity bias continue to exist in educational environments, showing up as verbal, symbolic, and unfair social treatment. Since religious identity often interacts with social power dynamics and patriarchal cultural constructions that impact ethnic minority women's educational experiences, this issue becomes more complex in the context of Islamic education [4].

Studies on multicultural Islamic education have generally emphasized aspects of tolerance, religious moderation, and the integration of pluralism values in the curriculum [5]. Meanwhile, research on women in Islamic education has mostly discussed gender equality in general terms without examining the interconnection of ethnic identity and students' social experiences from an intersectional perspective [6]. However, intersectionality theory developed by Crenshaw emphasizes that experiences of discrimination cannot be understood through a single identity alone, but through the intersection of multiple social identities such as gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class. Thus, a more thorough analytical method is needed for ethnic minority women's educational experiences in multicultural institutions.

Women's identity and intercultural education in Islamic educational settings have been the subject of several prior studies. For example, Hajisoteriou and Angelides (2020) investigate the difficulties of introducing multicultural education in majority-culture school systems [7], whereas Zine (2001) underlines the marginalization experiences of Muslim female students in Western multicultural schools [8]. In Indonesia, Rahman et al. (2026) discusses religious moderation in multicultural Islamic education [9], while Kusnawan et al. (2025) investigates gender relations in pesantren culture [10]. However, these studies have not specifically examined the learning experiences of ethnic minority women through an intersectionality perspective within Islamic education-based multicultural schools in local contexts such as Pekalongan Regency.

The transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia today no longer merely confronts the issue of transferring religious values, but also confronts the increasingly complex social identities of students [11]. Particularly in Pekalongan Regency, which is acknowledged as a hub for several ethnic groups like Javanese, Arab, Chinese, Madurese, and Sundanese immigrant communities, multicultural schools provide unique social dynamics in the practice of Islamic education [12]. Female students from ethnic minorities sometimes face unequal educational chances because of the intersection of gender identity, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and religion.

As Indonesian Islamic education starts to move toward a paradigm of religious moderation, inclusivity, and the bolstering of multiculturalism, this phenomena has grown in significance [13]. However, in practice, symbolic and structural practices still demonstrate the hidden subordination of minority women. This can take the form of cultural stereotypes, marginalization in classroom interactions, the dominance of majority culture in the hidden curriculum, and the low representation of minority identities in school religious activities [14].

As a region marked by religious commitment and social pluralism, Pekalongan Regency offers an important context for investigating this issue [15]. The complex identity struggle that takes place between normative Islamic principles and the experienced realities of social variety is exemplified by the establishment of multicultural Islamic schools [16]. In this setting, ethnic minority women often struggle to balance upholding their cultural heritage with fitting in with the dominant school culture, which prioritizes socio-religious homogeneity. However, as the growing discourse on intersectionality in educational studies shows, experiences of discrimination cannot be interpreted in a single way [17]. Ethnic minority women's identities in Islamic education are not just a gender issue; they are also entwined with power dynamics based on social status, ethnicity, language, and culture [18]. For a more thorough and critical understanding of students' learning experiences, an intersectional approach is therefore essential.

This current phenomenon is also reinforced by several national issues, including: first, the increasing attention to inclusive and multicultural education in national education policy; second, the Ministry of Religious Affairs' religious moderation agenda, which demands that Islamic schools become spaces of social tolerance; third, the persistence of identity-based discrimination in educational settings, whether verbal, symbolic, or structural; fourth, the gap in representation of minority women in school organizational leadership and religious activities; and fifth, the dominance of the majority culture in the Islamic learning system, often rendering the experiences of minority groups invisible [19]. Therefore, this research is important because it not only addresses Islamic education normatively but also examines how power relations operate in educational spaces through the intersection of gender and ethnic identities.

Based on this review, a research gap can be identified. First, previous studies tend to separate issues of gender, ethnicity,

and Islamic education as independent variables. Second, studies on multicultural education in Indonesia still predominantly focus on policy and curriculum aspects rather than the subjective experiences of ethnic minority female students. Third, there is still limited research using an intersectionality approach to understand how gender and ethnic identities intersect in shaping students' learning experiences in multicultural schools. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this academic gap through a more contextual and critical investigation.

Based on this background, the research questions of this study are: how is the intersectionality of ethnic minority women's identities manifested within the context of multicultural Islamic education in Pekalongan Regency? How are the learning experiences of ethnic minority women in multicultural schools in Pekalongan Regency? What factors influence the learning experiences of ethnic minority women in the context of multicultural Islamic education? How do schools develop inclusivity practices toward ethnic minority women in the learning process?

This study is expected to have both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it can enrich the study of multicultural Islamic education through an intersectionality perspective, particularly regarding the experiences of ethnic minority women in educational settings. Additionally, it is anticipated to aid in the advancement of inclusive Islamic education theory grounded in cultural diversity and social justice. In practical terms, it is anticipated that the results of this study will help Islamic educational institutions, educators, and legislators create learning systems that are more considerate of the varied identities of their pupils. Additionally, this study can be used as a basis for multicultural education policies that facilitate the establishment of inclusive, equitable, and safe learning environments for women from ethnic minorities.

This study is unique because it incorporates an intersectionality perspective, which has not been widely used in previous research in the Indonesian context, into the study of multicultural Islamic education. This study provides an original contribution by empirically showing how gender, ethnicity, and religiosity intersect to produce symbolic marginalization and identity negotiation within the everyday learning experiences of ethnic minority women in a local multicultural Islamic school setting. Previous studies have tended to examine gender, ethnicity, and Islamic education as separate and isolated variables, and multicultural education research in Indonesia has primarily focused on policy and curriculum design rather than students' subjective experiences. By situating Crenshaw's intersectionality framework within the specific socio-religious context of Pekalongan Regency, this study extends the theoretical application of intersectionality beyond its predominantly Western and secular origins, offering new insight into how religious identity interacts with gender and ethnicity to shape symbolic power relations in Islamic educational spaces.

Method

This study uses a case study design and a qualitative research methodology [20]. This method is employed in Pekalongan Regency's multicultural Islamic educational settings to thoroughly investigate and comprehend the intersectionality of identity and the educational experiences of ethnic minority female students [21]. Because it enables the researcher to investigate a constrained system in its actual setting, especially with regard to social interactions, cultural dynamics, and educational practices inside schools, the case study design was selected [22].

This study is carried out in multicultural Islamic schools in Pekalongan Regency, Indonesia, where pupils come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including Javanese, Arab, Chinese, and immigrant communities. The chosen schools are representative of educational environments where identity negotiation and multicultural engagement are common [23]. Throughout the research process, an ongoing analysis is conducted to find trends pertaining to intersectionality, identity negotiation, symbolic exclusion, and inclusive educational methods [24].

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, based on the criteria of direct involvement in the daily learning process within the selected multicultural Islamic schools and the ability to provide substantive information regarding students' identity-related experiences [21]. This study involved 18 key informants, consisting of 10 ethnic minority female students (representing Arab-Indonesian, Chinese Muslim, and migrant Sundanese backgrounds), 3 Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, 2 school principals, 2 homeroom teachers, and 1 school religious activity supervisor. This composition was intended to capture the perspectives of both the ethnic minority female students as the primary subjects of the study and the educators and school leaders who shape the institutional and pedagogical context in which those experiences occur.

The number of informants was determined based on the principle of information richness rather than statistical representativeness, which is consistent with the nature of qualitative case study research [22]. Iterative data collection was used, with the researcher reviewing and comparing emergent themes across informant groups following each round of interviews and focus group discussions. When no new themes, categories, or variations pertaining to intersectionality, symbolic exclusion, and identity negotiation surfaced from further interviews, data saturation was deemed to have been reached, with the remaining interviews functioning to validate and expand upon the preexisting thematic patterns.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was carried out by cross-checking information obtained from interviews, participatory observation, FGDs, and documentation, as well as by comparing the perspectives of student informants with those of teachers and school leaders [20], [22].

Results and Discussion

A. Overview of the Research Site

The research was conducted in multicultural secondary schools and universities in Pekalongan Regency that are characterized by the diversity of students' ethnic, cultural, and socio-religious backgrounds. The three selected schools were chosen because they demonstrate intensive interaction between Javanese students as the majority group and minority groups such as Arab-Indonesian, Chinese Muslim, migrant Sundanese, as well as several students from urban migrant families.

In general, these schools implement formal Islamic education through Islamic Religious Education (Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI) subjects, routine religious activities, religious habituation practices, and a school culture based on religious moderation. However, in daily practice, social dynamics indicate that students' learning experiences are not entirely neutral from constructions of gender and ethnic identity.

The study involved 18 key informants consisting of 10 ethnic minority female students, 3 Islamic education teachers, 2 school principals, 2 homeroom teachers, and 1 school religious activity supervisor. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD).

B. Identity Intersectionality in Islamic Education Learning Experiences

1. Gender and Ethnic Identity as Layered Social Experiences

The concept of intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how various forms of social identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and social class intersect in shaping individuals' experiences of both social subordination and privilege [25]. In its development, intersectionality theory has not only been used in feminist studies but has also expanded into educational studies, sociology of religion, and multicultural studies.

According to Collins and Bilge (2020), intersectionality is an analytical framework that positions identity as a social construct that does not stand alone, but is interconnected and shapes individuals' lived experiences in complex ways [26]. In the context of Islamic education, ethnic minority women do not only face challenges as women, but also as members of specific ethnic groups who may experience social and cultural marginalization.

Understanding how power dynamics function in educational settings requires an awareness of the intersectional approach to education. Curriculum, instructional strategies, school culture, and social interactions between students and teachers can all contribute to the development of these relationships. According to Zainuddin et al. (2025), religious and ethnic identities in multicultural schools frequently produce dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that affect minority female students' educational experiences [4].

From the perspective of Islamic education, intersectionality is also related to the concepts of justice (al-'adl), equality (al-musawah), and the respect for human dignity (karamah al-insan). Islamic education ideally does not only instill spiritual values but also fosters social awareness that respects the diversity of students' identities in an inclusive manner.

The findings show that the learning experiences of female students from ethnic minority groups cannot be understood through a single identity alone. Their experiences are shaped by the intersection of gender, ethnicity, social status, and religious expression. For instance, female students of Arab descent experience stereotypes as being "more religious" compared to other students. On one hand, this stereotype provides symbolic legitimacy in religious learning; on the other hand, it creates greater moral pressure on their behavior.

One informant stated:

"If I answer a religious lesson incorrectly, my friends sometimes say, 'How come an Arab doesn't know this?' So there is pressure."

Meanwhile, Chinese Muslim female students experience a different situation. They feel that their ethnic identity is often more prominently recognized than their Islamic identity.

One informant expressed:

"I have been Muslim since childhood, but I am still sometimes seen as different because of my facial features and family name."

These findings indicate that religious identity in educational spaces does not necessarily eliminate ethnic categorization. Multicultural schools instead serve as venues for difficult identity negotiations. The study's findings show that a gender or ethnic viewpoint is insufficient to fully comprehend the educational experiences of ethnic minority women in Islamic education at multicultural schools in Pekalongan Regency. Students' social experiences are shaped by the intersection of several interwoven identities in the educational setting, such as gender, ethnicity, language, cultural background, and socioeconomic standing. In this sense, intersectionality offers an essential analytical framework for understanding how power relations simultaneously affect female students from ethnic minority groups' educational experiences.

The results of the study show that in multicultural Islamic classrooms, female students from ethnic minorities often face ambiguous social roles. On the one hand, as stated in the Islamic educational tenets of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessing for the universe), schools normatively uphold the values of inclusion, tolerance, and equality. However, on the other hand, social practices in the classroom and in daily interactions still demonstrate the dominance of the majority culture, which indirectly impacts the psychological well-being of minority students. This condition is evident in the use of certain regional languages as a medium of informal communication, the concentration of symbols of the majority culture in school activities, and stereotypes against certain ethnic groups attached to female students.

In in-depth interviews, several informants reported that they frequently experienced symbolic marginalization, such as being perceived as "different," "closed," or "less adaptable" due to their ethnic background and communication styles differing from those of the majority group. These experiences demonstrate that ethnic identity does not exist in isolation but is reinforced by gender constructs that position women as a socially more vulnerable group to cultural and symbolic judgments. Thus, the experiences of discrimination are not isolated but rather the accumulation of various interconnected social identities.

This phenomenon aligns with Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, which asserts that minority women often experience multiple forms of subordination due to the intersection of gender and ethnic identities. In the context of Islamic education, this subordination does not always manifest itself in overt discrimination, but rather through cultural mechanisms embedded in learning practices and school social relations. For example, the involvement of minority female students in school religious organizations tends to be limited due to the dominance of the majority group, which has greater social and cultural access to leadership spaces.

Furthermore, the study found a process of identity negotiation among minority female students as a social adaptation strategy. Some informants chose to adapt their speaking style, dress style, and even religious interaction patterns to be more accepted within the school environment. This phenomenon demonstrates that educational spaces are not entirely neutral but rather become arenas for the reproduction of dominant values and cultures, indirectly demanding the homogenization of students' social identities.

This condition suggests that multicultural schools have not yet fully developed the potential to establish socially and culturally equitable learning spaces, according to a critical Islamic education perspective. Islamic education should incorporate instructional approaches that are considerate of the multiplicity of student identities in addition to instilling normative principles of equality and brotherhood. Therefore, an intersectional approach is crucial in the development of inclusive Islamic education so that schools can understand students' learning experiences more holistically, particularly for women from ethnic minority groups, who tend to occupy less visible social positions within the educational structure.

2. Symbolic Exclusion Experiences in Islamic Education Learning

Multicultural Islamic education is an educational approach that integrates Islamic values with the principles of respect for cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity in the learning process. According to Banks (2009), multicultural education seeks to advance educational equity by acknowledging students' diverse social identities [5].

Because Indonesian society is made up of many different ethnic and cultural groups, multicultural Islamic education is highly relevant in the country. Islamic education must foster attitudes of tolerance, inclusivity, and social justice in addition to normative religious ideals. Dwiyan (2023) emphasizes that multicultural Islamic education must be able to accommodate students' diverse identities without eliminating the foundational values of Islam [27].

Multicultural schools serve as social spaces where various identities meet, potentially creating both integration and symbolic conflict. Therefore, the implementation of multicultural Islamic education requires school policies that are sensitive to gender and ethnicity issues so that the dominance of majority culture over minority groups can be avoided.

The complete process of interaction between students and their educational setting that affects their cognitive, affective, social, and psychological growth is referred to as the learning experience. According to Kolb (2015), learning experiences are created by people interacting with the social world around them [28]. Gender stereotypes, cultural prejudice, inadequate identity representation, and unequal social interactions all have an impact on ethnic minority women's educational experiences. Mirza (2014) states that women from minority groups are more vulnerable to "double marginalization," namely marginalization based on both gender and ethnicity [6].

In the context of multicultural schools, the learning experiences of ethnic minority women can be reflected in, among others, participation in the learning process; social relations with teachers and peers; cultural representation in the curriculum; access to academic opportunities; and feelings of safety and acceptance within the school environment. Positive learning experiences encourage the development of students' self-identity and academic achievement. Conversely, discriminatory experiences can affect self-confidence, learning motivation, and even students' social engagement in school.

Based on classroom observations and interviews, a form of subtle symbolic exclusion was identified. This exclusion does not appear in the form of overt discrimination, but rather through the use of dominant cultural examples in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) materials; assumptions of cultural homogeneity within Islam; and the limited representation of minority ethnic experiences in classroom discussions.

PAI teachers tend to use a Javanese-Muslim cultural perspective as a universal representation of Islam. The Islamic traditions of ethnic minorities receive limited pedagogical space. For example, religious practices of Arab or Chinese Muslim families are often seen as "unique" or "different," rather than being recognized as a legitimate part of the diversity of

Islamic expression.

Classroom observations also found that majority students tend to be more active in discussions, while minority female students tend to remain silent. Teachers more frequently respond to students who are considered "representative." This indicates the presence of a hidden curriculum that unconsciously reproduces majority cultural dominance. Furthermore, symbolic exclusion is also evident in classroom communication patterns. Several informants revealed that using the majority regional language in informal interactions and class discussions made them feel isolated. Although there is no formal prohibition against the use of minority cultural identities, the dominance of the majority language creates a social structure that symbolically positions certain groups as the "center" and others as the "periphery." According to Pierre Bourdieu, this situation can be interpreted as a type of symbolic dominance that is perpetuated in educational institutions by the majority group's cultural capital.

This finding is consistent with Zine's (2021) study of Muslim youth in Canadian schools, which found that minority students often experience symbolic exclusion through the invisibility of their religious and cultural practices within a dominant institutional culture, rather than through overt discriminatory policies [8]. However, an important difference emerges when comparing the two contexts: whereas Zine (2021) examined marginalization experienced by a religious minority (Muslim students) within a secular multicultural system, the present study reveals a more layered form of symbolic exclusion, in which minority students are marginalized within an Islamic educational institution itself, on the basis of ethnicity rather than religion [8]. This suggests that symbolic dominance in education is not solely a product of religious-secular tension, as much of the Western literature assumes [7], but can also be reproduced internally within a religiously homogeneous institution through the unmarked privileging of a dominant ethnic culture's interpretation of Islam.

Furthermore, research indicates that women from ethnic minorities are less likely to engage in religious activities at school, such as Rohis groups, da'wah conferences, and Islamic ceremonial events. Rather than being a result of formal legislation, these limitations stem from the social construction of who is considered "worthy" to represent the school's religious community. Students from the dominant group are more often given social legitimacy to conduct religious activities, while minority students are usually on the margins. This pattern implies that power dynamics based on social identity are not totally absent from religious encounters in schools. Because kids who live at the junction of gender and ethnic identities feel this symbolic exclusion, it becomes more complicated in an intersectional approach. Informants are already positioned within social institutions that restrict their ability to express themselves because they are women. Their social vulnerability is made much more complicated when this identification interacts with their status as an ethnic minority. In Islamic educational settings, they have barriers to social acceptance in addition to problems with cultural representation.

These results show that creating truly inclusive learning environments is still a difficulty for multicultural Islamic education. Inclusivity has tended to be understood as merely administrative acceptance of student diversity, but has not yet addressed the transformation of school culture that is sensitive to the experiences of minority groups. Therefore, a reconstruction of Islamic education pedagogy is needed that is more reflective of symbolic power relations in learning. Islamic education is not sufficient only to teach the value of equality normatively; it must also be able to provide educational practices that recognize, respect, and represent the diversity of student identities fairly and equitably.

3. Identity Negotiation Strategies of Female Students from Ethnic Minority Groups

The findings indicate that female students from ethnic minority groups are not entirely passive subjects. They develop strategies of adaptation and identity negotiation. These strategies include adjusting language and speech patterns to resemble those of the majority group, concealing certain cultural identities, displaying stronger religiosity to gain social acceptance, and building cross-ethnic friendship communities as safe social spaces.

One informant stated:

"Joining the Islamic student organization is easier for acceptance because it is seen as being equally religiously active."

These strategies show that religiosity functions as a form of social capital for gaining legitimacy in a multicultural school environment. However, this process of adaptation also generates psychological burdens in the form of pressure to continuously conform to majority norms.

The research findings indicate that the Islamic education learning experiences of ethnic minority female students are inextricably linked to the intersectional identity processes inherent in them. Their identities as women, members of a minority ethnic group, and students in an Islamic-based educational environment constitute a complex and multi-layered social experience. In this context, identity negotiation strategies become a crucial mechanism used by female students to maintain their identity and gain social acceptance within the school environment.

The research findings demonstrate that ethnic minority female students tend to develop cultural adaptation strategies as a form of identity negotiation. This flexibility is seen in their use of the majority language in daily interactions, active involvement in school religious events, and modifications to their communication style. Instead of merely eliminating their ethnic identity, these strategies are employed in an effort to gain social legitimacy in an educational environment where a certain culture is prevalent. Because of this, the process of negotiating one's identity alternates between maintaining one's own identity and adhering to the norms set by the institution.

The results of the study provide theoretical support for the notion that understanding the intersectionality of identity is

necessary to understand students' learning experiences in Islamic education. People's perceptions of their educational experiences are influenced by the interplay of religious, gender, and ethnic identities. Islamic education is therefore essential as a social setting that can both transmit religious ideas and accommodate the multiplicity of student identities in an inclusive and humanistic manner.

These identity negotiation strategies echo findings from Medin et al. (2025) study of adolescents negotiating national identity in diverse Swedish schools, in which students similarly managed their belonging by strategically emphasizing or downplaying particular aspects of their identity depending on the social context [12]. A similar pattern is also reported by Maala et al. (2026) among Muslim learners in Philippine public schools, who adopted adaptive communication and social strategies to gain peer acceptance [1]. What distinguishes the present findings, however, is the specific role of religiosity as a negotiation resource: unlike the national-identity negotiation observed in the Swedish context [12], ethnic minority female students in this study strategically foreground their religious commitment—rather than downplay their ethnic identity—as a means of converting religious capital into social acceptance. This suggests that in religiously-inflected educational settings, identity negotiation operates not merely as a process of assimilation into the majority culture, but as a strategic conversion of one form of identity capital (religiosity) to compensate for the social cost of another (ethnic minority status).

4. Ambivalence in Multicultural Islamic Education

The study finds an ambivalence in the practice of multicultural Islamic education. On the one hand, schools promote values of tolerance, *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), religious moderation, and respect for diversity.

On the other hand, pedagogical practices still contain biases of majority cultural dominance. Multicultural values are more present at the normative level than in pedagogical practice. Islamic education has not yet fully integrated the lived experiences of minority students as a source of knowledge.

Gender studies in Islamic education have developed as a response to educational practices that are still influenced by patriarchal culture. Mernissi (1991) emphasizes that the subordination of women in education does not necessarily originate from Islamic teachings themselves, but rather from culturally biased interpretations [29]. In modern Islamic education, women have equal rights to access education and intellectual development. However, in social practice, ethnic minority women still face structural and cultural barriers that limit their participation in school environments. The gender approach in this study is used to examine how social constructions of women influence their learning experiences within multicultural Islamic education settings.

The research findings indicate that the implementation of multicultural Islamic education in the learning experiences of ethnic minority female students presents an ambivalent dynamic. Islamic education fundamentally promotes universal principles that place a high value on equality, respect for diversity, and human brotherhood. However, the way this education is actually conducted is still influenced by dominant social and cultural systems, which could lead to unequal educational chances for minority groups. The contrast between the normative goals of multicultural Islamic education and the social reality that pupils face in the classroom is highlighted by this ambivalence.

The results of the study show that multicultural principles have been theoretically incorporated into Islamic education training by educators and educational establishments. Teaching resources that include Islamic brotherhood, tolerance, and respect for diversity are crucial parts of the educational process. Additionally, schools work to foster an inclusive atmosphere by encouraging students to respect one another and participating in group religious activities. In this context, multicultural Islamic education serves as an instrument for fostering collective awareness regarding the importance of coexisting within social and cultural diversity.

However, this study found that the internalization of multicultural values is not yet fully reflected in everyday social interactions. Ethnic minority female students still face symbolic marginalization experiences that emerge through cultural stereotypes, ethnic jokes, and expectations to conform to the majority culture. This circumstance shows that power dynamics that establish majority identity as the normative standard still exist in schools as social places. Consequently, social behaviors in the field frequently clash with the ideas of inclusivity taught in Islamic education.

The status of students' religious and ethnic identities also reflects the ambivalence of multicultural Islamic education. On the one hand, Islamic identity facilitates social integration by fostering a sense of unity among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. A shared Muslim identity provides social legitimacy, enabling minority female students to feel accepted within the school community. However, on the other hand, ethnic identity remains a social marker that differentiates their position within the school's social relations structure. Thus, religious identity cannot completely erase the cultural hierarchies that develop in everyday life.

This research also found that ambivalence arises from Islamic education's approach, which tends to be normative and lacks contextualization of the reality of student diversity. Learning often places multiculturalism at the level of moral discourse, but fails to address critical aspects of power relations, cultural discrimination, and experiences of inequality experienced by minority groups. As a result, students understand tolerance as an ideal concept without the reflective space to discuss their social experiences openly and critically.

From an intersectional perspective, the learning experiences of ethnic minority female students demonstrate that gender, ethnic, and religiosity identities intersect in shaping their educational experiences. Students face challenges not only as members of an ethnic minority group, but also as women within a particular social structure with specific cultural and

religious expectations. Therefore, multicultural Islamic education needs to be developed through a more reflective, dialogical, and transformative pedagogical approach to create a truly inclusive learning space that is sensitive to the diversity of student identities.

This ambivalence between normative inclusivity and structural exclusion parallels findings from Rahman et al.'s (2026) comparative study of religious moderation in two pesantren-oriented schools, which similarly found a gap between the formal articulation of tolerance values and their inconsistent enactment in daily pedagogical practice [9]. It also resonates with Zainuddin et al.'s (2025) argument that Islamic educational institutions often struggle to translate the normative ideal of balancing spirituality with social tolerance into concrete institutional practice [4]. The present study extends this line of inquiry by demonstrating that this normative-practical gap is not experienced uniformly by all students, but is intersectionally distributed: it is ethnic minority female students, specifically, who bear the weight of this ambivalence most acutely, as they must simultaneously navigate gendered expectations, ethnic marginalization, and the pressure to perform religious conformity. This finding suggests that future research and policy on religious moderation in Islamic education should move beyond institution-level assessments of tolerance and instead adopt a subject-level, intersectional lens to capture how ambivalence is unevenly experienced across different student identities.

C. Implications for Islamic Religious Education

1. Reconstruction of the Islamic Education Paradigm

The findings indicate the need for a reconstruction of the Islamic education paradigm from a homogeneous approach toward an inclusive-intersectional approach. Islamic education is not sufficient if it only teaches tolerance at a normative level; rather, it needs to recognize the diversity of students' lived experiences, present plural cultural representations, and develop pedagogy that is sensitive to social identities.

Research results show that the intersectionality of identity has a significant influence on students' learning experiences in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The identities in question are not only related to religiosity but are also influenced by gender, social class, local culture, economic conditions, and access to technology and education. In this context, the paradigm of Islamic Education can no longer be understood in a singular and normative manner but must be reconstructed into an inclusive, humanistic, and contextual paradigm. The complexity and diversity of students' lives in the modern era make this reconstruction essential.

A uniform approach to Islamic education frequently fails to take into account the diversity of student identities, according to empirical studies. There is little room for a variety of social experiences during the learning process because PAI learning materials often present pupils as homogenous subjects. Because the principles taught do not adequately reflect the realities of their existence, some students suffer from cultural and psychological estrangement. This circumstance highlights the critical need to change the paradigm of Islamic education from a textual approach to one that is contemplative and transformative.

Strengthening intersectional awareness in the educational process must be the focus of the reconstruction of the Islamic education paradigm. Islamic education aims to foster students' critical understanding of the social realities that surround them in addition to imparting normative religious principles. From this perspective, Islamic values such as justice (*al-'adl*), equality (*al-musawah*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), and respect for human dignity (*karamah al-insan*) must be the primary foundation of learning design. Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to understand that students' identities are diverse and intersecting, so learning strategies need to be developed adaptively and dialogically.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of the Islamic Education paradigm also demands a shift in pedagogical orientation. The learning model, which has tended to be teacher-centered, needs to be redirected to participatory learning that makes room for students' lived experiences. Students' social experiences can serve as relevant learning resources for contextualizing Islamic values in everyday life. Thus, Islamic Education not only produces a cognitive understanding of religion but also fosters social awareness and human empathy.

In a broader context, the results of this study confirm that Islamic education must be able to respond to the dynamics of multicultural society and the digital era. The challenges of globalization, technological advancements, and shifting social interaction patterns among the younger generation are inextricably linked to the reconstruction of the Islamic education paradigm. As a result, Islamic education must adopt an integrative strategy that balances the spiritual, social, and cultural facets. Islamic education will be more successful in producing students who are religious, critical, moderate, and very socially sensitive if it adjusts to the intersectionality of identity.

Therefore, reforming the Islamic education paradigm based on intersectionality is a critical step toward creating a more inclusive and equitable educational system. Because this paradigm sees students as distinct individuals with complex identity experiences, the educational process must be able to acknowledge this diversity. In addition to being a means of imparting theology, this approach is expected to transform Islamic education into a site of social change and humanitarian awareness relevant to the needs of contemporary society.

2. Development of Intersectional Pedagogy

PAI teachers need to develop intersectional pedagogy that takes into account students' gender, ethnicity, social class, and cultural experiences. This pedagogy positions students' lived experiences as a legitimate source of learning. Research

results show that students' learning experiences in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) are influenced by various intersecting identities, such as gender, socioeconomic background, culture, level of religiosity, and access to education. This circumstance highlights the fact that a consistent and all-encompassing pedagogical approach is no longer appropriate for the PAI learning process. In order to establish a learning process that is inclusive, flexible, and socially just, it is imperative that intersectional pedagogy be developed.

The goal of intersectional pedagogy in Islamic education is to acknowledge the variety of student experiences as a crucial component of the educational process. This perspective holds that as students are viewed as active subjects with a range of social realities, learning techniques must consider the context of their identities. According to research findings, a pedagogical strategy that takes intersectionality into consideration might boost students' involvement, self-assurance, and emotional engagement in PAI learning.

Teachers' roles must change from merely imparting knowledge to encouraging discussion and critical thought in order to achieve intersectional pedagogy. Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to possess social sensitivity and the ability to understand the diversity of student identities so that the learning process does not lead to discrimination. In practice, teachers can integrate students' social experiences into learning discussions, so that Islamic values can be understood contextually and relevant to real life.

Furthermore, intersectional pedagogy encourages the use of participatory, collaborative, and reflective learning methods. Students can gain a critical knowledge of social issues, inequities, and power dynamics in society by using this method. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education serves as a tool for character development that is humanistic, moderate, and focused on social justice ideals in addition to transmitting religious information. In the end, developing intersectional pedagogy is a calculated move to increase Islamic education's applicability in a diverse and dynamic society.

3. Transformation of the Islamic Education Curriculum

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum needs to integrate narratives of multicultural Islam, the history of the diversity of Nusantara Islam, the experiences of minority groups, and anti-discrimination education. In this way, Islamic education does not merely serve as a medium for transmitting doctrine, but also becomes a space for the formation of social justice.

According to research findings, the necessity to change the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum is significantly impacted by the intersectionality of identity. Gender, culture, social status, family environment, and developments in digital media and technology are additional factors that influence students' educational experiences in addition to religion. This fact demonstrates how the normative and homogenous PAI curriculum frequently fails to adequately address the diversity of student identities. As a result, changing the curriculum for Islamic education is a calculated move to make education more accessible, relevant to modern social dynamics, and contextual.

Strengthening an integrated paradigm between normative Islamic ideals and students' social realities must be the focus of curricular reform for Islamic education. In this regard, the curriculum should emphasize the development of students' critical awareness, social sensitivity, and introspective abilities in addition to the transmission of religious knowledge. Islamic principles like equality (al-musawah), justice (al-'adl), tolerance (tasamuh), and respect for variety must be deeply included into the design of educational resources. In this way, students are able to understand Islamic teachings as living and relevant values in a pluralistic social life.

Furthermore, research findings show that the transformation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum also requires a flexible and responsive learning approach to students' social experiences. The curriculum needs to accommodate current issues, such as cultural diversity, gender equality, social inclusivity, and digital ethics from an Islamic perspective. This approach enables students to develop a more moderate and contextual understanding of religion, while simultaneously enabling them to critically respond to the challenges of modern society.

4. Strengthening Islamic Education Based on Social Justice

This study affirms that the goals of Islamic education should not be limited to the formation of individual piety, but must also be directed toward critical awareness, respect for differences, social justice, and liberation from symbolic marginalization. In this regard, multicultural Islamic education must go beyond simply "acknowledging diversity" to "transforming unequal power relations."

According to research findings, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is significantly impacted by the intersectionality of identity. Diverse learning experiences are the outcome of students' identities, which are shaped by the junction of gender, socioeconomic class, culture, disability, and religious background. In this regard, acquiring Islamic Religious Education cannot be viewed as an impartial process; rather, it is impacted by social institutions that determine students' access, involvement, and acceptance in learning settings.

According to this study, some Islamic Religious Education teaching methods still have a tendency to be uniform and do not adequately take into account the variety of student identities. For instance, because of the predominance of patriarchal society and unequal access to education, female students from underprivileged economic groups frequently have limited involvement in religious debate forums. Additionally, students from social minority groups have challenges due to stereotypes and symbolic exclusion in the educational process. These conditions imply that Islamic education needs to take a

more inclusive and social justice-focused approach.

The study's conclusions emphasize how important it is to change the paradigm of education in order to advance social justice-based Islamic education. In addition to teaching normative knowledge, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) must emphasize the development of critical awareness of social reality. In order to build egalitarian, dialogical, and humanistic learning environments and to comprehend the range of students' experiences, Islamic Religious Education teachers must be intersectionally sensitive.

Additionally, Islamic principles like *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (blessed for the universe), *al-'adl* (justice), and *al-musawah* (equality) must be applied contextually in educational practice. Islamic education can therefore be a tool for social change, promoting a fair and inclusive learning environment that upholds each person's dignity and does not discriminate on the basis of identity.

These results have practical ramifications for teacher professional development and educational policy. At the policy level, the religious moderation agenda of the Ministry of Religious Affairs should be operationalized beyond general tolerance messaging to include explicit institutional standards for gender and ethnic inclusivity in Islamic schools. For example, multicultural Islamic schools should be required to audit the representation of gender and ethnicity in their PAI teaching materials and extracurricular religious activities on a regular basis. The results indicate that, rather than treating diversity as a single, undifferentiated category, in-service training for PAI teachers should shift from generic tolerance workshops to intersectionality-based pedagogical training, giving teachers the reflective skills to understand how gender and ethnic identities intersect in shaping students' classroom participation. In order to assist PAI teachers in recognizing subtle forms of symbolic exclusion in their own pedagogical practice, such as the unconscious favoring of religious examples or communication styles from the majority culture, teacher certification and continuing education programs could include case-based modules based on findings like those presented in this study. As this study has demonstrated, the normative commitment to inclusive Islamic education runs the risk of being an ideal that is maintained in principle but unevenly implemented in practice in the absence of such focused policy and training measures.

Conclusion

According to the study's findings, ethnic minority female students' educational experiences in multicultural Islamic classrooms in Pekalongan Regency are significantly shaped by identity intersectionality. Complex educational experiences marked by both inclusion and exclusion in the school setting are produced by the junction of gender, ethnicity, and religion.

The results show that identity preconceptions, concealed curriculum biases, and symbolic marginalization still have an impact on students' engagement and participation in educational processes. These tactics do not completely eradicate the structural and symbolic injustices that exist in the educational system, even when students actively negotiate their identities through social adaptation and the bolstering of religiosity as social capital.

Furthermore, the way multicultural Islamic education is actually implemented in classrooms differs significantly from its normative ideals. Islamic education promotes social justice and inclusion, yet its teaching methods can reinforce dominant cultural norms and unequal power relations.

Consequently, this study emphasizes the need to create an inclusive curriculum, conduct an intersectional pedagogical reform, and construct Islamic education based on social justice principles. These initiatives are crucial to ensuring that multicultural Islamic education can genuinely offer inclusive and fair learning opportunities for all students, especially female students from ethnic minorities.

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