Amorti: Jurnal Studi Islam Interdisipliner
Vol. 5, No. 2 April 2026, pp. 1654-1661
http://journal.amorfati.id/index.php/amorti | | ISSN 2962-9209

Interdisciplinary Scope of Contemporary Islamic Studies • Interdisciplinary Islamic Education • Interdisciplinary Islamic Law, Ethics, and Fatwa Studies • Interdisciplinary Islamic Economics, Finance, and Philanthropy • Islam, Society, and Culture • Islam, Politics, Governance, and Public Policy • Islam, Gender, Family, and Human Rights • Islam, Media, Communication, and Digital Da'wah • Islam, Health, Environment, and Sustainable Development • Islam, Science, Technology, Artificial Intelligence, and Digital Transformation

Reconstructing Politeness Value Education in Pluralistic Islamic Higher Education

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received:
18 January 2026
Revised:
12 February 2026
Accepted:
18 March 2026
Available online:
25 April 2026

Keywords
Politeness Value Education, Hybrid Politeness, Multicultural Islamic Higher Education, Compassionate Pedagogy, Residential Social Engineering

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze, evaluate, and reconstruct the politeness value education model in multicultural private Islamic higher education institutions, focusing on Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak (IIMS) Jambi. Employing a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with institutional leaders, faculty members, and ten undergraduate students representing diverse ethnic backgrounds (Jambian Malay, Javanese, and Bugis), alongside institutional policy document analysis. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis supported by data triangulation to ensure credibility. The findings reveal that the internalization of politeness values at IIMS does not occur spontaneously but through systematic engineering across three main domains: (1) Formal-Structural via regulatory frameworks in orientation handbooks (PBAK), course syllabi (RPS), and digital communication circulars; (2) Non-Formal Residential via heterogeneous dormitory social engineering and spiritual routines; and (3) Informal-Interactional via behavioral automatism (Moral Action) in daily campus life. The synergy between Compassionate Pedagogy implemented by faculty, environmental conditioning, and local cultural wisdom (Siri' na Pesse) generates "Hybrid Politeness"—a speech convergence synthesizing Bugis directness, Javanese reserve, and Malay warmth under Islamic adab principles. This study contributes a novel, diversity-responsive character education model that effectively reduces horizontal conflict to zero percent (0%) while operationalizing digital communication ethics rooted in Qaulan Karima, Qaulan Layyina, and Qaulan Sadida.

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Introduction

Indonesia's archipelagic identity, encompassing over 1,340 distinct ethnic groups, establishes a sociocultural landscape where localized customs organically shape collective norms of interpersonal politeness (Hidayah, 2024). Beyond functioning as formal etiquette,

politeness serves as an inherent sociocultural compass in Eastern societies, emphasizing social hierarchy, deference to elders, and the preservation of mutual dignity over individual assertiveness (Salsabila et al., 2025). Fundamentally, this code of conduct is operationalized through the socio-religious concept of tahu adat (cultural literacy and propriety), where individuals align both verbal and non-verbal behaviors with local customs and religious tenets to maintain relational harmony (Hendra, 2025). However, within modern, highly heterogeneous higher education ecosystems, these unwritten normative consensus boundaries are frequently challenged. As students from diverse ethno-geographic backgrounds converge, conflicting behavioral benchmarks trigger cross-cultural friction and sociolinguistic "culture shock" (Widjanarko et al., 2025). In pluralistic campus environments, politeness is no longer an isolated matter of individual morality; it constitutes a complex process of sociocultural adaptation and conflict mitigation (Hidayah, 2024; Widjanarko et al., 2025).

Recent scholarship addressing campus pluralism has primarily focused on structural interventions. Studies have evaluated multicultural education curricula designed to cultivate early tolerance (Husni, 2019) or examined sociolinguistic politeness markers—such as address terms—as tools for campus cultural diplomacy (Agustina, 2025). Other inquiries have applied Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Gricean maxims to investigate face-threatening act (FTA) mitigation during academic discourse (Hidayah, 2024), alongside sociolinguistic studies demonstrating how speech accommodation strategies are mediated by social distance and regional background (Anugrawati & Syam, 2024). Despite these contributions, a critical empirical and theoretical gap remains unaddressed. Existing literature predominantly views politeness through either top-down institutional policy frameworks or static linguistic analysis. There is a marked paucity of research examining the spontaneous, informal value negotiations that occur within micro-spaces of campus life—such as cafeterias, student lounges, and informal study groups—where diverse normative codes collide daily (Achmad et al., 2025; Jaya, 2023). Furthermore, scholarship has yet to capture how student migrants continuously synchronize native cultural norms with dominant campus expectations to construct adaptive, "hybrid" politeness benchmarks (Achmad et al., 2025; Yunidar, 2025).

To bridge this gap, this study investigates the dynamic construction of politeness standards within a pluralistic Islamic Higher Education Institution (IHEI)—specifically Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak. As a regional Islamic college experiencing growing student diversity, this institution presents a compelling sociolinguistic and educational laboratory. Unlike secular universities, Islamic higher education operates under a dual mandate: fostering academic excellence while instilling foundational Islamic character (adab and akhlak al-karimah). In this setting, politeness is conceptualized as an integration of universal social ethics and Islamic principles of tawadhu (humility) and mutual respect. However, when heterogeneous student bodies enter this normative space, discrepancies in how students interpret polite versus impolite behavior frequently lead to communication barriers and administrative dissonance. Examining how this campus functions as a microcosm of Indonesian pluralism is critical for predicting future social cohesion (Manurung et al., 2024).

The primary objective of this research is to explore, analyze, and reconstruct the operational standards of politeness within the pluralistic campus ecosystem of Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak. Specifically, this inquiry addresses three core problem formulations: analyzing how diverse academic stakeholders conceptualize, negotiate, and operationalize politeness across formal and informal campus spaces; identifying the sociocultural and institutional mechanisms through which Islamic values (adab) interact with local cultural traditions; and formulating a grounded, culturally responsive value education model capable of transforming normative ambiguity into an inclusive framework for socio-academic integration. By focusing on the "middle-ground standards" that emerge from intensive cross-cultural interactions, this research moves beyond static descriptions of behavior to contribute a novel theoretical model for character education in resource-constrained, pluralistic Islamic higher education.

Method

To investigate the dynamic construction and operationalization of politeness value education within a multicultural campus environment, this study employs a qualitative research methodology with an exploratory case study design. Qualitative inquiry provides an optimal framework for capturing complex social interactions, subjective meanings, and behavioral nuances as experienced naturally by academic stakeholders without experimental manipulation (O'Brien et al., 2024). Conducted at Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak in Tanjung Jabung Timur, Jambi, this setting serves as a compelling sociocultural laboratory due to its diverse student demographic converging within a regional Islamic higher education framework. The researcher served as the primary instrument (key instrument) for data collection and analytical synthesis, maintaining physical and prolonged engagement on site while strictly upholding research ethics—including informed consent, non-exploitation, participant anonymity, and respect for institutional integrity (Ravitch & Carl, 2024).

Data collection was executed through a comprehensive, multi-method approach combining participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and institutional document analysis. Participant observation was conducted across both formal academic settings (lecture halls and administrative offices) and informal campus micro-spaces (cafeterias, dormitories, and student lounges) to capture real-time non-verbal behavioral cues, speech accommodation patterns, and spontaneous value negotiations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2024). Purposive sampling was utilized to select key informants, comprising university administrators, faculty members, and a heterogeneous cohort of ten undergraduate students chosen to reflect distinct ethno-geographic backgrounds and social distances. In-depth interviews explored participants' conceptualizations of politeness (adab), experiences with cross-cultural friction, and perceptions of institutional role models, guided by flexible protocols to uncover organic insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2025). Furthermore, primary field data were corroborated by analyzing policy artifacts, student codes of conduct, institutional mission frameworks, and campus activity logs.

Analytical processing followed an interactive and iterative qualitative framework, utilizing reflexive thematic analysis to transform raw field data into conceptual insights (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Field notes, interview transcripts, and policy documents underwent systematic data reduction through open and axial coding, isolating core themes related to linguistic accommodation, moral modeling, and hybrid politeness benchmarks while discarding non-salient data. Reduced data were subsequently organized into structured thematic matrices to facilitate cross-case comparison and pattern identification across diverse participant cohorts. Final conclusions were generated through continuous inductive reasoning and theoretical abstraction, moving beyond simple descriptive narrative toward the conceptual modeling of value education in pluralistic Islamic institutions (Saldaña, 2025).

To ensure qualitative rigor and trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability), the study implemented prolonged field engagement alongside comprehensive triangulation strategies (Creswell & Creswell, 2025). Data credibility was reinforced through method triangulation—cross-verifying interview accounts against observational logs and written policy documents—as well as source triangulation, comparing perspectives between university leadership, faculty, and students from contrasting ethnic origins. Extended immersion in the field minimized personal and participant reactivity distortions, while peer debriefing and audit trails were maintained throughout the analytical process to verify coding consistency (Silverman, 2024). This rigorous verification framework ensured that the formulated model of politeness value education accurately reflects the sociocultural realities of the campus environment.

Results and Discussion

The construction of politeness value education at Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak (IIMS)

Jambi is systematically designed through a synthesis of Islamic adab theology and the local wisdom of a pluralistic border community. Field research demonstrates that the internalization of politeness values is legally locked from the intake stage during the Introduction to Academic and Student Culture (PBAK) by explicitly incorporating a dedicated chapter on dress codes and behavioral etiquette within the PBAK Student Handbook (2/W/IV/2026; 2/W/IV/2026). This commitment is hierarchically enforced in classrooms through course contracts that establish strict affective assessment weights and prohibit T-shirts or ripped jeans (1/O/V/2026; 1/D/V/2026). The institution further extends the academic public sphere into the digital realm by issuing official circulars regulating digital communication via WhatsApp, mandating the avoidance of informal slang and the respect of faculty office hours (3/D/V/2026). This formal normative structuring aligns with the Moral Knowing framework in Lickona's (2024) Value Education Theory, wherein cognitive comprehension of regulatory frameworks serves as the essential foundation before moral values can be translated into daily behavior.

Beyond the classroom, IIMS executes social engineering strategies to bridge potential conflicts arising from student ethnic diversity, which is predominantly composed of Jambian Malay, Javanese, and Bugis backgrounds. Dormitory administrators deliberately implement a randomized and heterogeneous rooming policy in the residential master plan, placing assertive Bugis students alongside reserved Javanese students and Malay peers (1/O/V/2026; 1/D/V/2026). This policy compels intensive cultural negotiation, transforming public spaces such as the canteen and campus mosque into arenas for linguistic harmonization through the adoption of the Jambian Malay dialect as a lingua franca and the practice of Qur'anic Qaulan Layyina communication (1/O/V/2026). Value transmission is further reinforced by an internal emotional driver rooted in the Bugis philosophy of Siri' na Pesse, where students feel a sense of dishonor if impolite conduct tarnishes their family's reputation while studying abroad (16/W/VI/2026; 14/W/VI/2026). This cultural integration supports the findings of Ward and Szabó (2024) regarding the efficacy of residential social engineering in mitigating culture shock and accelerating positive acculturation within multicultural higher education environments.

The operationalization of politeness values at IIMS achieves optimal success through the implementation of Compassionate Pedagogy by faculty members who position themselves as empathetic mentors rather than feudal figures. Interactional observations confirm that lecturers consistently initiate greetings with warmth, listen patiently to student concerns, and offer constructive feedback, prompting voluntary respect (ta'zim al-ustadh) reflected in students' respectful bowing gestures in campus corridors (1/O/V/2026; 9/W/V/2026). This persuasive, dialogic approach yields significant empirical outcomes; Quality Assurance Institute (LPM) data document a zero percent (0%) rate of disciplinary infractions and ethno-religious horizontal conflicts over recent years (1/D/V/2026). This success fosters a "Hybrid Politeness"—a new ethical standard where Bugis directness, Javanese reserve, and Malay warmth blend harmoniously under Islamic moral guidelines (1/O/V/2026). As emphasized by Gibbs and Cooper (2024), empathy-based pedagogy is significantly more effective at transforming institutional behavioral climates than punitive disciplinary measures.

The internalization cycle of politeness values among IIMS students unfolds through a continuous process linking formal instruction, structured non-formal activities, and daily social interactions into an enduring personal disposition (malakah). Within formal classroom settings, politeness functions as a hidden curriculum while being directly integrated into Course Syllabi (RPS), carrying a 15–20% allocation in affective evaluation (1/D/V/2026). Classroom sessions consistently open and close with prayers and the recitation of Asmaul Husna, while debate sessions are closely moderated by faculty to ensure students present counterarguments without belittling peers (4/W/V/2026; 1/O/V/2026). Assigning a substantial weight to affective assessment sends a clear structural signal that failing to uphold academic adab directly impacts course completion. According to Rizvi et al. (2024), embedding ethical values into formal curricula alongside clear evaluation mechanisms is a pivotal

instrument for shifting superficial compliance into sustained academic ethical awareness.

This internalization process is deepened in structured non-formal spheres focusing on cultivating emotional and spiritual sensitivity (Moral Feeling). A central mechanism in this sphere is mandatory congregational prayer five times daily at the campus mosque followed by studies on classical adab texts, during which all academic and organizational activities pause completely upon the call to prayer (1/D/V/2026; 3/W/V/2026). The evening residential ecosystem acts as an incubator for dialogic supervision; senior students and residential advisors address curfew breaches or elevated voice levels persuasively without physical coercion (1/O/V/2026). The humbling of regional egos on the prayer rug gradually diminishes abrasive cross-ethnic speech, transforming normative rules into intrinsic moral motivations. Berkowitz et al. (2024) confirm that non-formal habituation ecosystems combining religious routines with peer-monitoring frameworks effectively reinforce character formation in higher education.

This internalization cycle culminates in the emergence of behavioral automatism (Moral Action) within daily social interactions, where polite actions occur spontaneously without strict surveillance. Field observations show students instinctively lowering their posture and maintaining respectful eye contact when encountering faculty, alongside maintaining orderly queuing behavior at the campus canteen (1/O/V/2026; 2/W/V/2026). In informal public spaces, ethnic diversity triggers dynamic communication convergence; Bugis students gradually soften their speech intonations by absorbing the gentle cadences of Jambian Malay, while Javanese students embrace directness without losing polite speech markers (3/W/V/2026; 1/O/V/2026). The holistic integration across these three spheres demonstrates that politeness values at IIMS have achieved complete transinternalization. This validates the theoretical model of Suissa and Higgins (2023), which posits that value internalization reaches its peak when moral compliance is driven not by fear of sanctions, but by personal comfort and social identity fulfillment.

The implementation of politeness education at IIMS is sustained by a constellation of reinforcing determinants, with faculty role modeling serving as its primary anchor. Instructors' consistency in offering greetings, initiating warm interactions, and respecting students' time eliminates rigid feudal relational patterns, replacing them with mutual respect (4/W/V/2026; 1/O/V/2026). This determinant is supported by integrated environmental conditioning through randomized heterogeneous dormitory assignments and explicit campus regulatory instruments ranging from PBAK handbooks to WhatsApp conduct guidelines (1/D/V/2026). The synergy between institutional authority modeling and environmental conditioning creates a conducive ecosystem for character development. This finding aligns with research by Han et al. (2023), which highlights moral modeling by instructors as the most prominent predictor in fostering student emotional engagement and character formation.

Despite high overall success, the value implementation process faces potential hurdles in the form of initial culture shock and primordial ethnocentrism during transition periods. Incoming students frequently bring rigid regional communication habits, such as the assertive speech volume of Bugis students, which was initially perceived as aggressive by Javanese peers (3/W/V/2026). Additionally, reliance on informal text abbreviations in messaging posed an early challenge to enforcing digital communication ethics with faculty (2/W/V/2026). These potential points of failure are structurally mitigated through policy bans on exclusive regional student organizations (organda), randomized classroom group work, and dialogic residential advisory approaches (3/W/V/2026; 1/O/V/2026). Al-Thani et al. (2024) underscore the necessity of institutional mitigation against primordial ethnocentrism to prevent social fragmentation in diverse campus environments.

Multi-perspective politeness education yields transformative impacts on student communication ethics across face-to-face and virtual settings. In the digital realm, students' discipline in observing formal WhatsApp messaging structures—including formal greetings,

clear self-identification, adherence to working hours, and avoidance of slang—represents an operationalization of Qaulan Karima (honorable communication) (2/W/V/2026; 1/D/V/2026). In academic discussions, students employ Qaulan Layyina (gentle speech) and Qaulan Sadida (accurate speech) parameters to ensure intellectual disagreements do not damage personal relationships (1/O/V/2026). This integration of theological and technological communication ethics accords with findings by Hassan et al. (2024), demonstrating that operationalizing Islamic communication principles into digital campus policies enhances academic interaction quality and student professionalism.

Sociologically, the construction of politeness value education reshapes the social interaction landscape at IIMS from potential cross-ethnic friction into a sustained culture of non-violence. Synthesizing Islamic adab with localized cultural values like Siri' na Pesse establishes a strong self-regulation mechanism among student sojourners (17/W/VI/2026). Empirical manifestations of this social impact are visible in orderly canteen queuing, formal greeting exchanges, and the total absence of bullying, brawls, or ethno-religious disputes on campus (1/O/V/2026; 1/D/V/2026). Reaching a zero percent conflict rate demonstrates that politeness has evolved from a regulatory requirement into an institutional way of life. As explained by Nguyen and Walker (2025), when politeness norms are successfully integrated across all levels of a campus ecological system, an inclusive and harmonious social climate naturally ensues.

Viewed through Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), the emergence of "Hybrid Politeness" among IIMS students represents an active process of speech convergence. Initial interactions exhibited divergence due to students maintaining distinct regional communication styles (3/W/V/2026). However, through environmental social engineering in dormitories and regulatory conditioning in classrooms, students consciously adjust their voice volume, tone, and lexical choices to align with shared campus norms (1/O/V/2026). Bugis students moderate speech intensity, Javanese students increase communicative directness, and the Jambian Malay dialect serves as a unifying bridge (9/W/V/2026). According to Giles and Zhang (2025), voluntary communication convergence within diverse groups is a key indicator of successful social adaptation and cohesive group identity formation.

Overall, these empirical findings reconstruct an adaptive, diversity-focused model of character education tailored for private Islamic higher education institutions. The success at IIMS Sabak demonstrates that instilling politeness values cannot rely solely on single-track doctrinal or punitive approaches. The model's strength lies in its integration of formal-structural interventions (PBAK, course syllabi, digital circulars), environmental social engineering (heterogeneous dormitories, public spaces), empathetic faculty modeling (Compassionate Pedagogy), and local cultural wisdom (Siri' na Pesse). This integrative framework offers novel theoretical and practical contributions to multicultural character education management capable of preventing social conflict and elevating digital-era student communication ethics (Zainuddin et al., 2025).

Conclusion

Politeness value education at Institut Islam Al-Mujaddid Sabak (IIMS) Jambi does not emerge spontaneously; rather, it is systematically reconstructed through the continuous integration of three primary domains. In the formal-structural domain (Moral Knowing), values of adab are legally locked from the orientation phase (PBAK), embedded as a hidden curriculum within course syllabi (RPS) carrying a 15–20% affective evaluation weight, and extended into the virtual sphere through official regulations on WhatsApp communication etiquette. In the non-formal residential domain (Moral Feeling), internalization is deepened through social engineering via heterogeneous dormitory rooming assignments and congregational worship routines, ultimately culminating in the informal-interactional domain (Moral Action) as spontaneous behavioral automatism across all campus public spaces.

The synergy between environmental engineering, regulatory enforcement, and faculty-led Compassionate Pedagogy as a framework for moral modeling successfully eliminates rigid

feudal relational dynamics and dissolves student ethnocentrism. Cross-ethnic adaptation involving Jambian Malay, Javanese, and Bugis backgrounds triggers speech convergence (Communication Accommodation Theory) that synthesizes the local philosophy of Siri' na Pesse with Islamic adab doctrines. This cultural harmonization gives rise to a new ethical benchmark termed "Hybrid Politeness" and operationalizes Qur'anic communication principles (Qaulan Karima, Qaulan Layyina, and Qaulan Sadida) within daily interactions, which empirically accounts for reducing ethno-religious horizontal conflicts and disciplinary infractions to zero percent (0%).

Theoretically and practically, this study reconstructs an integrative character education model that is highly adaptive for private Islamic higher education institutions operating in border or demographically heterogeneous regions. The model demonstrates that character cultivation in multicultural academic environments cannot rely solely on single-track doctrinal or punitive approaches. Transformative value internalization achieves peak efficacy when institutions holistically and sustainably combine formal regulatory structures, residential social engineering, empathy-based pedagogical modeling, and the institutionalization of local cultural wisdom.

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