

Formation of Students' Religious Identity Through the Integration of Islamic Values and the Local Wisdom of the Dayak Punan Tribe

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the formation of religious identity among Dayak Punan students through the integration of Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. The study is based on the assumption that religious identity is not formed solely through religious instruction but through continuous interaction between religious teachings, cultural experiences, social relationships, and educational environments. This research employed a qualitative approach with an interpretive phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving Islamic Religious Education teachers, students, school administrators, parents, religious leaders, and indigenous community representatives. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to Islamic values, Dayak Punan cultural wisdom, identity negotiation, and educational practices. The findings reveal that religious identity formation among Dayak Punan students occurs through four main processes: value recognition, value internalization, identity negotiation, and identity expression. The integration of Islamic values, including tauhid, amanah, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship, with local values such as solidarity, respect for nature, and communal responsibility enables students to construct a balanced identity as Muslims and members of the Dayak Punan community. This study contributes to Islamic education by emphasizing the importance of culturally responsive, dialogical, and community-based approaches in strengthening religious identity while preserving indigenous cultural heritage.



Introduction

Religious identity formation has become an important issue in contemporary education because students' identities are shaped not only by religious knowledge but also by social interactions, cultural experiences, family values, and educational environments (Nurhayati, Dina Liana, 2025). Religious identity refers to the process through which individuals understand, internalize, and express their religious beliefs, moral commitments, and social responsibilities in everyday life. Schools play a strategic role in this process because they function as spaces where students negotiate personal identity,

religious values, and cultural belonging (Nurhayati, Latif, & Anwar, 2024). Previous studies indicate that students' religious and ethnic identities develop through interactions between personal experiences and social recognition, where a supportive educational environment strengthens students' sense of belonging and identity commitment (Zedan, 2025). Similarly, research on minority youth demonstrates that identity compatibility and school belonging contribute significantly to positive identity development because students tend to construct stronger identities when their cultural backgrounds are acknowledged within educational institutions (Gharai, Fleischmann, & Phalet, 2024). However, many educational systems still face challenges in integrating religious education with students' local cultural contexts, particularly among indigenous communities whose knowledge systems are often marginalized by standardized curricula.

The relationship between Islamic education and local wisdom has received increasing scholarly attention because culturally relevant education provides opportunities for students to connect religious teachings with their lived experiences. In Islamic education, values such as tauhid (faith in God), amanah (responsibility), ukhuwah (social solidarity), ta'awun (cooperation), and environmental stewardship can be contextualized through local cultural practices. Previous studies suggest that integrating local culture into religious learning can improve students' moral understanding, strengthen character formation, and create meaningful learning experiences (Sauri, Nursyamsiah, & Nurdin, 2022). In indigenous communities, local wisdom functions as a cultural resource that contains ecological, social, and ethical knowledge transmitted across generations. Studies on Indigenous education emphasize that meaningful learning requires recognition of community knowledge, involvement of cultural actors, and respect for indigenous epistemologies (Washington & Johnson, 2023). Within the Dayak Punan community, local wisdom is reflected in collective values, kinship relations, ecological awareness, and spiritual connections with nature. Research on Punan communities reveals that forest conservation practices and traditional knowledge represent not only survival strategies but also moral frameworks that regulate human relationships with nature and society (Hastuti, 2023). Nevertheless, these cultural values have received limited attention within the framework of Islamic education and student identity formation.

Although previous studies have explored religious identity, indigenous knowledge, and culturally responsive education, several important research gaps remain. First, existing studies on religious identity among minority students mainly focus on ethnic relations, social belonging, and psychological development, while limited research examines how religious identity is constructed through the interaction between Islamic values and indigenous cultural traditions (Gharai et al., 2024). Second, research on Dayak Punan communities has predominantly examined ecological knowledge, traditional practices, and cultural preservation, rather than investigating how young generations interpret their religious identity within formal educational settings (Rajoo, Lepun, Kayok, Hakim, & Irie, 2025). Third, studies on Muslim indigenous communities tend to focus on religious conversion, identity negotiation among adults, or challenges of religious guidance, while the experiences of students as active agents in constructing religious and cultural identities remain underexplored (Yuswanto, Aryani, & Muttaqin, 2022). Therefore, there is a need for research that investigates how Islamic education can become a space for dialogue between religious values and local wisdom, particularly among Dayak Punan students who experience the intersection between Islamic identity, indigenous heritage, and educational transformation.

This study contributes a new perspective by proposing an integrative framework for understanding religious identity formation among Dayak Punan students through the interaction between Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. Unlike previous studies that

treat local culture merely as supplementary teaching material, this research positions Dayak Punan wisdom as a meaningful knowledge system that contributes to students' religious interpretation, moral development, and social identity construction. The novelty of this study lies in examining how students negotiate their identity as Muslims and members of the Dayak Punan community through classroom practices, school culture, family interaction, and community engagement. The research is significant because it provides theoretical contributions to studies of Islamic education, indigenous education, and identity development while offering practical implications for developing culturally responsive Islamic learning models. By integrating Islamic principles with locally grounded values, education can support students in maintaining religious commitment while preserving cultural belonging. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the process of religious identity formation among Dayak Punan students through the integration of Islamic values and local wisdom, identify the forms of integration implemented in educational practices, and explore the factors that support or hinder the development of students' religious and cultural identities.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach with an interpretive phenomenological design to explore how religious identity among Dayak Punan students is formed through the integration of Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focuses on understanding meanings, experiences, interpretations, and social practices constructed by students and their communities rather than measuring relationships between variables. Phenomenological research is appropriate for investigating lived experiences because it enables researchers to examine how individuals interpret phenomena within their social and cultural contexts (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, phenomenological approaches have been widely used to reveal the processes of identity construction, religious meaning-making, and internalization of spiritual values among learners (Guritno, Lessy, & Ahmad, 2022). This research was conducted in an educational setting involving Dayak Punan students who experience the interaction between Islamic teachings, indigenous cultural values, family traditions, and school practices. The research location was selected purposively because the community represents an indigenous context where religious identity and cultural identity develop simultaneously.

The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives. The informants consisted of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers, Dayak Punan students, school principals, parents, religious leaders, and indigenous community representatives. The selection criteria included direct involvement in Islamic learning processes, understanding of Dayak Punan cultural values, and experience in the transmission of religious and cultural knowledge. Data were collected through three techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions of Islamic identity, experiences of integrating religious values with local traditions, and the role of family and school environments in shaping identity (Lisnawati, Hayati, Kurnia, Nugraha, & Ruswandi, 2025). Observations focused on classroom interactions, religious activities, cultural practices, and school programs related to character education. Documentation analysis included Islamic education curricula, learning materials, school policies, and cultural documents relevant to Dayak Punan traditions. Similar qualitative studies on religious identity formation have demonstrated that interviews, observations, and documentary analysis are effective methods for understanding the complex relationship

between religious education and identity negotiation (Ramadona, Musonif, & Priyatno, 2025).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, involving data transcription, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and conclusion formulation. The analysis focused on identifying major themes related to Islamic values, Dayak Punan local wisdom, educational practices, identity negotiation, and factors influencing students' religious identity formation. The validity of the findings was ensured through methodological triangulation, source triangulation, and member checking by comparing information obtained from students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. This approach was applied to strengthen credibility and ensure that the interpretation represented participants' authentic experiences. Thematic analysis is widely recognized as an appropriate method for identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative educational research, particularly studies examining culture, identity, and social experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Furthermore, research on culturally responsive and indigenous education emphasizes that studies involving indigenous communities should position local knowledge holders as active participants in knowledge construction rather than merely as research objects (Washington & Johnson, 2023). Therefore, this methodological design allows the study to produce a contextual understanding of how Islamic values and Dayak Punan wisdom interact in shaping students' religious identities

Results and Discussion

1. Integration of Islamic Values and Dayak Punan Local Wisdom in Students' Religious Identity Formation

The findings reveal that the formation of religious identity among Dayak Punan students occurs through an integrative process between Islamic values taught in schools and local cultural values practiced within the community. This integration does not involve replacing cultural identity with religious identity; rather, it represents a dialogical process in which Islamic teachings interact with students' cultural experiences and everyday realities. Islamic values, including belief in Allah (tauhid), responsibility (amanah), social solidarity (ta'awun), respect for others, and environmental responsibility, are understood by students through meaningful experiences embedded in their cultural environment. These findings indicate that religious education becomes more meaningful when connected to students' socio-cultural contexts because education does not merely transmit religious knowledge but also facilitates the construction of identity through social experiences. Previous studies confirm that integrating religious values with local cultural contexts can strengthen students' religious and cultural identities by providing contextual learning experiences that are closely connected to their daily lives (Nurdin & Jamila, 2025).

Within the Dayak Punan community, cultural values such as collective solidarity, respect for nature, family responsibility, community care, and harmonious relationships between humans and the environment provide valuable pedagogical spaces for understanding Islamic teachings. For instance, the cultural principle of maintaining ecological balance among the Punan community shares conceptual similarities with the Islamic view of humans as khalifah (stewards) who are responsible for protecting and preserving Allah's creation. Consequently, students do not perceive Islam merely as a set of religious obligations related to worship practices, but also as a comprehensive value system that regulates relationships between humans and God, between individuals, and between humans and nature. Research on Dayak communities demonstrates that local wisdom is not limited to cultural traditions but also contains ethical, social, and ecological

values that can serve as important foundations for character education (Suswandari, Armiyati, & Azid, 2022).

These findings strengthen the argument that culturally grounded religious education can create learning experiences that are more socially relevant and meaningful for students. Islamic education that relies solely on normative approaches may create a gap between religious understanding and students' lived realities. In contrast, contextualizing Islamic values through cultural experiences enables students to establish stronger connections between religious teachings and their personal identities. Previous research on local wisdom-based education indicates that incorporating cultural values into learning processes contributes to students' moral understanding, character development, and social connectedness within their communities (Sauri et al., 2022). Therefore, the integration of Islamic values and Dayak Punan local wisdom provides an educational pathway for developing religious identities that are spiritually grounded while remaining culturally meaningful.

2. Identity Negotiation: Being Muslim and Being Part of the Dayak Punan Community

The findings indicate that Dayak Punan students experience a process of identity negotiation between their religious identity as Muslims and their cultural identity as members of an indigenous community. This process demonstrates that students' identities are dynamic and continuously shaped through interactions among family, school, religion, and community environments. The students do not perceive Islamic identity and Punan cultural identity as conflicting dimensions; instead, they understand both identities as complementary aspects of their personal and social development. Religious identity provides spiritual foundations and moral guidance, while cultural identity offers a sense of belonging, historical continuity, and social connectedness with their community of origin.

This finding is consistent with previous studies on religious and ethnic identity development, which highlight that minority students' identity formation is strongly influenced by social acceptance and educational environments that recognize their cultural backgrounds. When schools provide opportunities for students to express and maintain their cultural identities, students tend to develop stronger feelings of belonging toward both their educational institutions and communities (Gharaei et al., 2024). Conversely, when local cultures are marginalized or excluded from educational practices, students may experience a gap between their personal identities and the values represented by the school environment.

In this study, the process of identity negotiation is reflected in the way students interpret family traditions, community practices, and Islamic Religious Education learning experiences. Students gradually recognize that several cultural values, such as respecting parents, helping others, maintaining social harmony, and protecting nature, are compatible with Islamic principles. This finding suggests that religious education can function as a space for identity reconstruction, enabling students to preserve their cultural heritage while strengthening their religious commitment. Studies on Muslim Dayak communities reveal that religious identity transformation often involves processes of social and cultural adaptation; therefore, educational approaches should avoid separating religious teachings from the cultural contexts in which communities live (Masri, Hidayati, Prasojo, Abdillah, & Zarbaliyev, 2025).

3. The Role of Teachers and Schools in Developing Culturally Based Religious

Identity

The findings demonstrate that Islamic Religious Education teachers play a significant role as mediators between religious values and local cultural knowledge. Teachers do not merely act as transmitters of religious content but also serve as facilitators who help students understand the relationship between Islamic teachings and their cultural realities. The strategies implemented by teachers include incorporating examples from Punan community life, facilitating discussions on cultural values, strengthening character through social activities, and connecting Islamic concepts with students' surrounding environments.

The role of teachers reflects the principles of culturally responsive teaching, an educational approach that recognizes students' cultural experiences as essential components of the learning process. This approach positions students' cultural backgrounds not as obstacles but as valuable sources of knowledge that can enhance meaningful learning experiences. Research on Indigenous education emphasizes that successful culturally based education depends on teachers' ability to understand local communities, respect indigenous knowledge systems, and establish meaningful relationships with cultural knowledge holders (Washington & Johnson, 2023).

Schools also contribute to religious identity formation by developing educational cultures that appreciate students' diverse identities. School environments that provide space for local culture through religious activities, social programs, and environmental learning initiatives can strengthen students' connection with their cultural and religious identities. Research on Indigenous education further highlights that the involvement of families and communities in educational processes supports cultural sustainability and increases the relevance of education for younger generations (Washington & Johnson, 2023). Therefore, the formation of religious identity among Dayak Punan students should not be viewed solely as the responsibility of Islamic Religious Education teachers but as a collective process involving schools, families, and indigenous communities.

4. A Model of Religious Identity Formation among Dayak Punan Students

Based on the research findings, a conceptual model was identified to explain the process of religious identity formation among Dayak Punan students. The model consists of four interconnected stages: (1) value recognition, which occurs through religious and cultural learning experiences; (2) value internalization, which develops through social interactions and everyday practices; (3) identity negotiation, which emerges through dialogue between religious teachings and cultural traditions; and (4) identity expression, which is reflected in students' religious behaviors and social actions. These stages demonstrate that religious identity formation is a gradual process involving continuous interaction between knowledge acquisition, personal experiences, social relationships, and cultural environments.

The proposed model indicates that religious identity is not merely the result of students' cognitive understanding of religious doctrines but is constructed through complex relationships among religious knowledge, lived experiences, social contexts, and cultural backgrounds. This finding expands the discussion of Islamic education by demonstrating that religious identity among indigenous students is developed through reciprocal interactions between religious values and cultural meanings. Previous research on local wisdom-based education confirms that cultural values can function as important educational resources for strengthening students' religious character, tolerance, social responsibility, and community awareness (Sodikin, Syahid, Arif, & Pettalongi, 2025).

The main contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that the integration of Islamic values and Dayak Punan local wisdom is not merely a pedagogical strategy but also

a mechanism for shaping students' religious identities. Islamic education can serve as a space where students develop strong religious commitments while maintaining appreciation and pride toward their indigenous cultural heritage. This finding provides a new perspective that religious education in indigenous communities should be developed through dialogical, contextual, and community-based approaches. Such an approach enables students to construct identities that are simultaneously religiously grounded, culturally connected, and socially responsible.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the formation of religious identity among Dayak Punan students occurs through a dynamic process of interaction between Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. Religious identity is not constructed solely through formal religious instruction but through meaningful experiences involving family, school, community, and cultural practices. The integration of Islamic values such as tauhid, amanah, social responsibility, respect for others, and environmental stewardship with Dayak Punan values of solidarity, ecological awareness, and communal responsibility enables students to develop a religious identity that is spiritually committed while remaining connected to their cultural heritage. The findings demonstrate that Islamic education within indigenous communities becomes more relevant when it recognizes local wisdom as an essential component of students' learning experiences and identity development.

This research contributes to the understanding of Islamic education by proposing that religious identity formation among indigenous students requires a dialogical, contextual, and community-based approach. The process involves four interconnected stages: value recognition, value internalization, identity negotiation, and identity expression. Through this process, students are able to construct an identity as committed Muslims without losing their cultural belonging as members of the Dayak Punan community. Therefore, culturally responsive Islamic education can serve as an important framework for strengthening religious commitment, preserving indigenous knowledge, and developing students who possess both spiritual integrity and cultural awareness.

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