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Can Religious Education Foster Inclusion without Losing Identity? Empirical Evidence from Digital Learning and Religious Diversity in Indonesia

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Abstract

Religious education in digitally connected societies confronts a dual challenge: sustaining students' religious commitments while cultivating equitable relationships across religious differences. This study examines (1) how digital religious learning and institutional practices shape identity negotiation and inclusion in contemporary Indonesian education and (2) which pedagogical and institutional mechanisms support inclusion without erasing religious identity, in dialogue with Western and global experiences. A qualitative empirical documentary multiple-case design analyzes publicly accessible reports, peer-reviewed empirical studies, policy documents, and recorded controversies from Indonesia, triangulated with UNESCO and European digital-governance material. The principal cases concern school-uniform and religious-symbol disputes, documented educational intolerance, and students' encounters with online religious information. The documentary findings reveal three interacting tensions: the gap between formal commitments to diversity and uneven implementation; digital expansion of religious authority without commensurate source evaluation; and a recurring misconception that inclusion requires religious sameness. Rather than treating technology as a direct cause of tolerance, the analysis identifies teacher-mediated source criticism, protected dialogue, identity-affirming choice, cross-group collaboration, and institutional accountability as plausible mechanisms linking digital encounters to more inclusive practice. These are analytical findings from secondary empirical evidence, not results of new interviews or classroom observation. The study proposes an evidence-informed, context-sensitive pedagogical pathway and specifies its limits and implications for Indonesian schools and international debate.

Keywords: *religious education; digital literacy; multicultural education; Indonesia; religious identity; documentary case study*

INTRODUCTION

Digital media have changed both the ecology of religious knowledge and the boundaries of the classroom. Indonesian students encounter sermons, short videos, discussion groups, algorithmically recommended content and AI-generated explanations alongside the interpretations offered by teachers, families and religious institutions. This transition can widen participation and expose learners to diverse religious practices, yet

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increased connectivity does not by itself produce mutual respect. The 2023 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report emphasizes that the educational value of technology depends on context, pedagogical purpose, equity and governance rather than on devices alone (UNESCO, 2023). The Indonesian problem is particularly consequential because public schooling combines state commitments to pluralism with the teaching of distinct religious traditions. This combination produces a practical question that is more demanding than whether schools have adopted learning platforms: how do students learn to remain recognizably committed to their own traditions without reproducing stereotypes, coercion or exclusion toward other traditions? Studies of Indonesian students' internet-based Islamic learning indicate that social media can connect formal lessons to informal religious authority, while critical evaluation is needed to interpret what is encountered (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025). Thus, digital transformation is best approached as a changing social and pedagogical environment, rather than a neutral container for religious content. The controversy is also global. In Europe, debates about platform recommender systems and protections for minors illustrate how digital architectures can amplify exposure to harmful material and create pressures that cannot be resolved by individual digital skills alone (Commission, 2025b). A study concerned with Indonesian religious education therefore requires attention to both local religious pluralism and the political economy of global digital platforms.

Recent Indonesian documentary evidence demonstrates that inclusion is not merely an aspirational curriculum outcome. SETARA Institute's 2024 freedom-of-religion monitoring and subsequent 2025 reflections document episodes affecting educational institutions, including objections to the establishment of religious schools and disputes about religious clothing or expression (SETARA Institute, 2025b, 2025a). Human Rights Watch described hijab-related pressure in public schools and drew attention to the 2023 Lamongan incident, in which girls reportedly had their hair cut for a uniform-related violation (Human Right Watch, 2024). These episodes must not be generalized to all Indonesian schools, and accounts from advocacy organizations should be distinguished from independent outcome evaluations. Nevertheless, they expose a specific educational problem: an institution may proclaim coexistence while everyday administrative practice narrows the religious autonomy of particular learners. Crucially, coercion and exclusion can arise through both compelled religious expression and the restriction of voluntarily chosen expression. The policy question is therefore not whether visible identity should disappear, but under what conditions schools can guarantee student choice and equal standing. A 2025 Indonesian mixed-methods study on religious moderation and school-uniform policies offers a useful counterpoint: it reports that policies perceived as neutral need not weaken religious identity, suggesting that institutional non-coercion and individual attachment can coexist (Husna et al., 2025). Read together, the contradictory documentary cases make inclusion an observable governance problem, not simply a moral exhortation.

The international literature offers analytical resources but also leaves important gaps when transferred uncritically to Indonesia. Multicultural education scholarship links

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recognition, curricular participation and equitable institutional arrangements (Banks, 1997, 2006); the digital-education literature identifies opportunities for collaboration while warning against technological determinism (Timotheou et al., 2023). Despite growing scholarly attention to digital religious learning and multicultural education, existing research has largely examined religious identity, technological engagement, and educational inclusion as separate analytical domains. Limited attention has been directed toward the interaction between pedagogical mediation and institutional governance in explaining how digitally connected educational environments can foster inclusion without compromising students' religious identities (Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026; Harjatanaya, 2025; Ju'subaidi et al., 2025). Moreover, accounts of religious inclusion derived from Western minority contexts for example, Muslim experiences in North American education or European debates about religion in secular schools cannot simply be assumed to represent Indonesia's configuration of majorities, local minorities, state-recognized religious instruction and regionally varied school rules (Ciornei et al., 2022; Oberoi, 2012). Western experiences nevertheless illuminate two transferable dilemmas: accommodation without stigmatization and institutional neutrality without forced secular uniformity. Another gap concerns mechanism. Studies often separately examine technology adoption, values of tolerance and religious instruction, but do not trace the intervening practices through which an online encounter becomes either a stereotype or a respectful disagreement. Consequently, the field needs an empirically anchored, mechanism-oriented account that does not mistake the accessibility of digital information for the achievement of educational inclusion.

This study addresses the identified research gap through a qualitative documentary multiple-case analysis that examines the relationship between religious identity, digital learning, and multicultural inclusion by systematically analyzing documented Indonesian educational controversies, institutional policies, and published empirical evidence. It has two objectives: first, to examine how digital religious learning and institutional practices shape the negotiation of religious identity and multicultural inclusion in contemporary Indonesian education; and second, to analyze the pedagogical and institutional mechanisms that can strengthen inclusive religious education while preserving religious identity, considering relevant Western and global experiences. The central research questions ask what tensions are visible across contemporary Indonesian documents and which mechanisms plausibly explain divergent educational implications. Its empirical contribution is to identify patterns and contradictions across heterogeneous, traceable secondary material rather than to claim access to unobserved learner experiences. Its theoretical contribution is a conditional account of digital mediation: learning technologies create opportunities for encounter, while pedagogical facilitation and rights-respecting institutional rules determine whether such encounters support identity-secure dialogue. Its practical contribution is a set of curriculum, classroom and governance indicators that educators can assess without prescribing the dilution of religious belief. Because case evidence is uneven and secondary, the resulting mechanism is a reasoned explanatory proposition rather than a causal estimate or nationally representative measurement.

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METHOD

This study employs a qualitative empirical approach using a documentary multiple-case study design to examine the intersections of religious identity, multicultural inclusion, and digital transformation in contemporary Indonesian education. Documentary analysis enables researchers to systematically examine and interpret existing documents to generate empirical knowledge, contextual understanding, and meaningful insights into social phenomena (Bowen, 2009). The multiple-case study design facilitates the examination of contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts while allowing researchers to identify similarities, differences, and recurring patterns across cases (Yin, 2018). The unit of analysis comprises publicly documented educational practices, institutional policies, religious identity negotiations, and digital religious learning in Indonesian schools. The empirical evidence principally covers developments between 2023 and 2026, while earlier scholarly literature provides the theoretical and historical foundations for interpreting the findings.

Case selection employs purposive sampling, particularly a maximum variation strategy, to identify information-rich cases representing diverse manifestations of religious inclusion and exclusion (Patton, 2015). The cases are organized into three analytical categories. The first encompasses controversies surrounding religious clothing, school-uniform policies, religious expression, and students' religious autonomy, including the Lamongan incident documented by Human Rights Watch and cases reported by SETARA Institute. The second concerns institutional practices of religious inclusion, educational intolerance, religious accommodation, and access to faith-based education. The third focuses on digital religious learning, students' critical awareness of online religious information, religious literacy, and pedagogical responses to digital polarization. International documentation from UNESCO and the European Commission complements the Indonesian cases by providing comparative insights into educational inclusion, digital inequality, and platform governance. This variation-oriented selection enables the identification of convergent and divergent patterns without assuming statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through systematic documentary analysis of institutional reports, government and regulatory documents, publicly documented educational controversies, and peer-reviewed empirical studies. Following Bowen (2009), document selection was guided by four criteria: authenticity and traceability of the source, relevance to the research objectives, clarity of the publication period and contextual background, and adequacy of empirical information for analytical interpretation. Civil-society monitoring reports and human rights documentation were used to identify reported incidents and institutional practices, while published survey-based, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies provided evidence concerning students' experiences, religious literacy, and educational practices. Government and international institutional documents were examined to contextualize educational policies and digital governance. Relevant evidence was organized into a documentary case matrix containing source identification, publication year, geographical or institutional context, reported phenomena, principal findings, analytical categories, and evidential

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limitations. This procedure established a traceable relationship between documentary evidence and analytical interpretation (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018).

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis in conjunction with within-case and cross-case analysis. Drawing on Braun and Clarke (2006), the analytical process followed six interconnected stages: familiarization with the documentary data, generation of initial codes, identification of preliminary themes, review of emerging themes, definition and interpretation of themes, and production of the analytical narrative. Initial coding focused on religious identity, coercion, accommodation, educational access, digital religious authority, source evaluation, teacher mediation, intercultural dialogue, participation, and institutional accountability. Within-case analysis was conducted to examine the contextual characteristics and educational implications of each documented phenomenon, followed by cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns, contextual variations, and alternative explanations (Yin, 2018). The analytical process generated three overarching themes: (1) the divergence between institutional commitments and the actual practice of religious inclusion; (2) the transformation of religious authority in digital environments and the importance of critical literacy; and (3) the construction of an identity-preserving pedagogical pathway integrating educational practices and institutional governance. These themes were interpreted through multicultural education, religious identity, and digital pedagogy perspectives, with international literature serving as a comparative analytical framework.

Research trustworthiness was addressed through the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was supported through source triangulation and the examination of convergent and contradictory evidence from academic studies, institutional reports, and policy documents. Transferability was facilitated by contextualizing the Indonesian cases and identifying the institutional and sociocultural conditions under which the findings might be applicable. Dependability was supported through explicit document-selection criteria, systematic coding procedures, and a traceable case-by-source matrix. Confirmability was pursued by distinguishing documented events and published empirical findings from the researcher's analytical interpretations. Ethical considerations included protecting the identities of minors, maintaining contextual accuracy, and avoiding unsupported generalizations regarding religious communities. As the study relies on secondary empirical evidence, its findings are subject to limitations associated with selective public reporting, uneven geographical coverage, and the absence of direct classroom observation and interviews. Accordingly, the proposed pedagogical pathway represents an empirically informed analytical framework rather than a statistically validated causal model.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the documentary evidence and cross-case analytical matrix that forms the empirical foundation of this study. Drawing on ten selected documentary sources published between 2023 and 2026, the matrix systematically organizes documented educational controversies, institutional reports, empirical research findings, and international

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policy documents into distinct analytical categories and educational implications. The Indonesian evidence encompasses religious coercion, institutional exclusion, religious discrimination, religious accommodation, interpretive competence, digital religious authority, and digital pedagogy. Meanwhile, international documentation from the European Commission and UNESCO provides comparative perspectives on platform governance, digital safeguarding, and educational equity. This analytical categorization facilitates the identification of recurring patterns and contextual differences across heterogeneous sources while maintaining a distinction between documented incidents, empirical research findings, and international policy perspectives.

Table 1. Documentary Evidence and Cross-Case Analytical Matrix

Empirical source	Case or phenomenon	Analytical category	Educational implication
(Human Right Watch, 2024)	Lamongan school-uniform controversy	Religious coercion	Identity security and student protection
(SETARA Institute, 2025a)	Reported intolerance in educational institutions	Institutional exclusion	Rights-respecting school governance
(SETARA Institute, 2025b)	Freedom of religion and belief	Religious discrimination	Institutional accountability
(Husna et al., 2025; Al Jazeera Staff, 2026)	Religious moderation and school-uniform policies	Religious accommodation	Voluntary religious identification
(Hidayah et al., 2025)	Religious literacy in secondary education	Interpretive competence	Contextual religious understanding
(Ju'subaidi et al., 2025)	Internet-based Islamic learning	Digital religious authority	Critical source evaluation
(Ardiansyah et al., 2023)	Google Classroom in Islamic education	Digital pedagogy	Teacher-mediated learning
(European Commission, 2025)	Online protection of minors	Platform governance	Digital safeguarding
(UNESCO, 2023)	Technology and educational inequality	Digital equity	Context-sensitive digital learning

As presented in Table 1, three interconnected analytical patterns emerge from the documentary evidence. First, controversies surrounding religious expression, school-uniform policies, and institutional discrimination reveal tensions between formal commitments to religious inclusion and their implementation in educational settings. Second, the expansion of digital religious authority highlights the importance of interpretive competence, critical source evaluation, and teacher-mediated learning in navigating increasingly complex religious information environments. Third, evidence concerning religious accommodation, digital safeguarding, and educational equity provides an analytical foundation for developing an identity-preserving pedagogical pathway that integrates classroom practices with institutional governance. These patterns suggest that inclusive religious education cannot be achieved solely through curriculum reform or technological adoption but requires mutually reinforcing pedagogical, institutional, and digital-governance mechanisms. The following

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subsections elaborate on these three patterns by examining their empirical foundations, theoretical significance, and educational implications within the Indonesian context and broader global discourse.

Identity, School Rules, and the Uneven Practice of Religious Inclusion

The first pattern emerging from the case matrix is the divergence between formal institutional narratives of religious harmony and the heterogeneous rules through which schools regulate identity in everyday life. National commitments to pluralism do not resolve which religious expression may be displayed, what accommodation is reasonable, who has authority to define uniformity, or how students may challenge a rule (Ergeshov, 2025). SETARA Institute's 2024 monitoring and 2025 school-focused reflection identify controversies over restrictions on religious clothing, resistance to faith-based educational institutions and disputes surrounding religious expression. These reports cannot establish that schools generally are intolerant; they can establish that inclusion is contested in publicly observable educational settings. The case material therefore shifts the question from whether learners know a definition of tolerance to whether educational rules enable them to participate without unwanted religious conformity (SETARA Institute, 2024, 2025a; Raby, 2008).

The Lamongan uniform-related episode illustrates the stakes of this distinction. As reported by Human Rights Watch in February 2024, a teacher in a public junior secondary school cut the hair of fourteen girls in August 2023 following a dispute over a head covering worn beneath the hijab. The documented episode raises questions of dignity, procedural restraint, discipline and the use of religiously inflected appearance rules (Babicka-Wirkus, 2025). A single report does not prove the frequency of similar treatment elsewhere or explain all participants' intentions. Its analytical significance lies in the asymmetry between institutional control and children's ability to decline or negotiate that control. Treating compliance as evidence of religious commitment risks making students perform a form of identity defined by authority rather than experience religious education as a process of moral reflection (Human Right Watch, 2024).

A comparison with disputes over restrictions on face-veiling, the wearing of hijabs and the establishment of religious schools reveals that exclusion can be generated through apparently opposite interventions. Coercing a learner to wear religious clothing and prohibiting a learner from choosing a religious expression are different practices but share an underlying problem when neither provides a justified, proportionate, appealable rule (Howard, 2011; Ibrahim, 2021). At the same time, not every school regulation is discriminatory: age, health, safety and defined educational responsibilities may warrant restrictions if they are based on evidence, applied consistently and allow reasonable accommodation. The inference from the documents is consequently narrower and more useful than the assertion that all identity-based rules are harmful. Inclusive religious education requires legitimate institutional procedures that distinguish religious freedom from compelled conformity while protecting the rights of learners with different commitments (Ergeshov, 2025; Laycock, 2012).

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The 2025 mixed-methods Indonesian research on religious moderation and uniform policy provides an important counterweight to crisis-centered reporting. Its reported student responses suggest that religiously neutral choice rules can coexist with continuing Muslim identification and customary hijab wearing, rather than automatically dissolving attachment to faith. The study's sample and implementation context must be reviewed before extrapolating nationally, but the conceptual relevance is strong: voluntary religious practice can be sustained precisely because schools avoid making dress conformity a measure of civic belonging. This observation contradicts the false binary in which schools must either guard religion through compulsion or encourage inclusion through the concealment of religion (Harvey et al., 2024; Wardi et al., 2026). It supports a third possibility—identity-secure inclusion—where participation is not conditional upon abandoning commitments (Husna et al., 2025).

The school cases also draw attention to institutional silence. A curriculum may recommend harmony, yet students may lack a confidential complaint mechanism, teachers may not share a workable definition of religious accommodation, and disciplinary decisions may be made without listening to affected families. These possibilities should be investigated locally rather than assumed from reports alone. However, as an analytic model, they explain why moral vocabulary and institutional practice can diverge (Chotimah et al., 2025; Rahmadonna et al., 2025). Religious education can teach respect in the lesson while administrative routines communicate a different lesson about whose identity is normal, whose identity needs permission and which students are exposed to punishment. The educational environment thus contains an explicit curriculum and an institutional or hidden curriculum (Harjatanaya, 2025). Inclusion becomes credible when both communicate equal dignity (Harjatanaya, 2025; Rahmadonna et al., 2025).

This is consistent with multicultural education's insistence that textbook content is insufficient where school culture reproduces unequal participation (Chotimah et al., 2025; Sirry et al., 2024). Indonesia makes this concern especially pressing because identity may be articulated through religion, ethnicity, region, language and intersecting social positions (Harjatanaya, 2025; Rahmadonna et al., 2025). In a classroom with a religious majority, a well-meaning invitation to discuss difference can still place a minority learner under pressure to represent an entire tradition. Teachers should therefore design protected participation rules: students may explain their beliefs but should not be required to expose private religious experience, justify their group's legitimacy or defend themselves against discriminatory generalizations (Bakali et al., 2026). The point is not to substitute secular neutrality for religion but to prevent an unequal allocation of educational voice (Harjatanaya, 2025; Sirry et al., 2024).

Western literature illuminates the problem while requiring contextual caution. Recent studies involving Muslim students and educational communities in Canada and Northwestern Europe reveal challenges associated with Islamophobia, institutional surveillance, religious recognition and unequal educational participation (Abbas & McNeil-Willson, 2025; Bakali et al., 2026). Indonesian majority-minority arrangements differ, and the

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categories 'Western secularism' and 'Indonesian religiosity' are themselves internally varied (Abbas & McNeil-Willson, 2025; Harjatanaya, 2025). Nonetheless, the comparison reveals a shared pedagogical hazard: teachers can mistake the institutional majority's habits for the neutral baseline. The transferable principle is procedural rather than doctrinal. Students should be able to articulate religious difference, have their rights respected and participate in common learning without being ranked by their degree of cultural conformity (Abbas & McNeil-Willson, 2025; Bakali et al., 2026; Harjatanaya, 2025).

Evidence from school cases further suggests a need to separate three dimensions of inclusion. Recognition means that learners' faith positions are not disparaged or erased. Participation means that curricular, classroom and extracurricular arrangements do not systematically exclude a group. Protection means that an institution responds to coercion, bullying and discriminatory interference, including when such conduct is undertaken by staff (Bakali et al., 2026; Harjatanaya, 2025; Rahmadonna et al., 2025). Recognition alone can become symbolic; participation without protection can expose learners to harassment; and protection without opportunities for dialogue can maintain peaceful separation without deeper understanding (Abbas & McNeil-Willson, 2025; Sirry et al., 2024). The three dimensions offer empirical indicators that can be observed in future school fieldwork rather than a merely declarative claim about tolerance.

A more inclusive design can begin with a documented school-rule audit. Researchers or administrators could compare written rules with student-facing explanations, disciplinary records, complaint procedures and accessible alternatives (Harjatanaya, 2025; Rahmadonna et al., 2025). Such an audit would enable a stronger empirical test than a single attitude questionnaire. It would also help assess whether contradictory reports reflect uneven local implementation, changes over time or genuinely different principles. The present secondary-document study cannot perform the audit, but its cross-case analysis specifies what the next study should observe. The practical implication is that the preservation of identity is not only a matter of classroom religious knowledge; it is also a matter of institutional legitimacy and the distribution of rights (Bakali et al., 2026; Chotimah et al., 2025; Harjatanaya, 2025).

Digital Religious Authority, Critical Literacy, and the Risk of Polarization

The second pattern concerns the reorganization of religious authority through connected learning environments (Chair et al., 2024; Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026; Soedjiwo et al., 2025). Students can now encounter interpretations of belief in school lessons, online videos, peer networks and algorithmically ordered feeds, frequently without transparent information about the scholarly credentials or incentives of the content producer (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025; Munandar et al., 2026; Soedjiwo et al., 2025). The original manuscript correctly emphasized that digital media extend religious learning beyond the classroom. The documentary evidence sharpens this insight by locating the educational problem in the assessment of authority. An online account may be accurate, misleading, performative, commercially optimized or intentionally provocative; its visibility and repetition are not indicators of credibility (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Wineburg et al., 2022). Indonesian research on students' critical awareness of

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internet and social-media sources for Islamic learning demonstrates the relevance of source assessment for public senior high school education (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025).

The key empirical distinction is between exposure and learning. A student may watch diverse religious videos but interpret them through a pre-existing preference, or see only reinforcing recommendations (Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026). A teacher may assign a digital discussion and assume that engagement indicates openness, although observable participation could be driven by social pressure. Conversely, sustained contact with different interpretations may prompt questions and deeper study without immediate attitude change. These alternatives mean that screen time, number of platforms and frequency of religious posts are poor stand-alone measures of inclusion (UNESCO, 2023). Better measures would examine how learners compare sources, respond to disagreement, distinguish religious teachings from hostility and identify manipulative content (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Munandar et al., 2026; Wineburg et al., 2022). What matters is the quality of the interpretive task, not technological novelty.

The available Indonesian survey and qualitative studies point to the value of integrating critical literacy and religious moderation, but they should not be combined into a single causal claim (Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026; Muzayanah et al., 2025). For example, research on religious literacy among secondary students in Kediri identifies a gap between normative familiarity and more demanding capacities for contextual interpretation and interfaith dialogue (Hidayah et al., 2025). The study describes particular schools and respondents; its value for the present analysis is to identify a measurable distinction between memorized knowledge and interpretive competence. A student who can recite a religious teaching accurately may still struggle to evaluate a viral claim that misrepresents another community (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025; Wineburg et al., 2022). Such findings support the need for source criticism and respectful argument as explicit learning outcomes rather than as assumed side effects of religious knowledge (Cho et al., 2025; McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Sirry et al., 2024).

Digital misinformation creates a specific classroom dilemma when strongly worded posts appear to challenge a religious group. Silencing discussion may avoid immediate conflict but forgo an opportunity to teach critical evaluation; unstructured debate may reproduce the harm (Sirry et al., 2024; Van Bavel et al., 2024). A facilitated approach begins by temporarily separating source-verification questions from doctrinal commitments. Students identify who authored a claim, when and why it was circulated, whether it omits contextual information, what evidence supports it and how a member of the referenced community might experience its wording (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Wineburg et al., 2022). They can then discuss ethical implications without being pressured to change their own faith affiliation (Harjatanaya, 2025). The objective is epistemic responsibility under pluralism: to reason carefully about public claims while acknowledging that different religious convictions may remain.

The literature on Indonesian digital pedagogy supports a shift from transmission to active interpretation (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025; Soedjiwo et al., 2025). Studies of religious teaching

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via learning management systems, YouTube and interactive modules show that schools increasingly use varied digital resources (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2026). These studies cannot be taken as proof that any specific platform reduces intolerance. They instead provide evidence that digital channels are present in religious-education practice and can be deliberately designed. The original article's account of dialogue, reflection, collaboration and literacy remains useful as a pedagogical framework, but the current analysis treats those components as observable mediating practices, not universal results of technology adoption (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Muzayanah et al., 2025).

The European debate supplies a crucial external comparison because many platforms encountered by Indonesian students operate transnationally. The European Commission's 2025 report on focus groups with young people and its 2025 guidelines regarding the protection of minors under the Digital Services Act describe risks associated with large online platforms, recommender systems and harmful online interactions (European Commission, 2025a, 2025b). These documents do not study Indonesian religious classrooms and should not be cited as evidence that Indonesian students experience a particular level of risk. Their contribution is institutional: they indicate that responsibility for the digital learning environment cannot be allocated exclusively to individual teachers or children (Ritonga & Harahap, 2026; European Commission, 2025). Platform design, reporting mechanisms, content amplification and institutional transparency can condition which sources children encounter and how difficult it is to disengage from harmful material (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022; European Commission, 2025a).

The comparison also qualifies an overly optimistic account of student agency. Education may increase the ability to identify misinformation, but students cannot individually inspect every recommendation process or remove all discriminatory content from a network (Cho et al., 2025; European Commission, 2025b). A school's digital-literacy program should therefore combine personal competencies with institutional protocols for safeguarding, reporting harassment and assessing vendor privacy (UNESCO, 2023; European Commission, 2025b). UNESCO's global technology-in-education analysis makes a similar general point: learning technologies should be evaluated against educational goals, equity and the conditions of their deployment (UNESCO, 2023). This is not an argument against digital learning; it is an argument against treating digital adoption as an outcome measure. Schools need evidence of what digital activities enable learners to understand and do (Wineburg et al., 2022; McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Timotheou et al., 2023).

Religious identity is also shaped by the emotional form of online communication (Soedjiwo et al., 2025). A short, emotionally salient video may make a contested claim more memorable than a lengthy curricular explanation. Reaction metrics can reward simplified boundaries between 'us' and 'them' (Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026; Van Bavel et al., 2024). the same affordances can be used constructively through carefully moderated student work that compares local cultural practices, traces common ethical concerns or engages with first-person accounts of different communities (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025).The difference lies in pedagogical scaffolding, the credibility of sources and the norms of response. Such lessons should

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recognize that authentic disagreement is not itself intolerance; the relevant threshold is whether disagreement is expressed without dehumanization, coercion or unequal treatment (Harjatanaya, 2025; Sirry et al., 2024).

Teachers face an authority dilemma in this environment. They cannot credibly act as the sole gatekeepers of religious knowledge when learners routinely consult outside sources, but abandoning their interpretive responsibility would expose students to unsupported assertions (Chair et al., 2024; Fitriyanti & Nur, 2026; Ju'subaidi et al., 2025). The appropriate role is a credible facilitator who makes criteria for evaluating claims explicit and who models principled disagreement (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Sirry et al., 2024). A teacher can acknowledge that interpretations vary within religious traditions, invite learners to identify the type of evidence a text provides and ensure that minority perspectives are not turned into classroom curiosities (Harjatanaya, 2025; Sirry et al., 2024). This role requires both subject competence and literacy about digital communication (Ju'subaidi et al., 2025; McGrew & Byrne, 2022). It also requires teachers to distinguish between evaluating the quality of an argument and publicly grading a student's religious commitment (Harjatanaya, 2025).

This analysis leads to a testable proposition: digital encounters are more likely to contribute to inclusive understanding when a structured task requires source comparison, reciprocal listening and reflection under clear protection rules (Wineburg et al., 2022; Muzayanah et al., 2025). The current evidence supports the plausibility of this proposition but does not estimate its effect. A future mixed-method study could compare student reasoning before and after a moderated digital lesson, analyze actual discussion transcripts and interview participants from religious majority and minority positions. Outcome indicators should include argumentative quality, perceived safety and willingness to engage across difference rather than a simple self-reported tolerance score (Wineburg et al., 2022; Sirry et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). This research agenda directly follows from gaps in the available documentary record.

An Identity-Preserving Pedagogical Pathway: Indonesian Lessons and Global Implications

The third pattern joins the school-governance evidence to the digital-learning evidence. The former shows that institutional rules can produce exclusion regardless of what the curriculum says; the latter shows that digital contact can amplify either perspective-taking or misinformation depending on how it is mediated (Harjatanaya, 2025; Xiao et al., 2026). Consequently, an inclusive model must operate on two levels: pedagogy and institutional governance (Harjatanaya, 2025; OECD, 2023). At the pedagogical level, students need guided opportunities to encounter difference, evaluate evidence, discuss disagreement and reflect on shared civic obligations (Wineburg et al., 2022; Sirry et al., 2024). At the governance level, they need protection from coercion and discrimination and a fair process for contesting decisions (Geurts et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024). The two levels reinforce one another because a classroom cannot sustain open dialogue if students reasonably fear that expressing their identity will trigger punishment or ridicule (Harjatanaya, 2025; UNESCO, 2024).

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The revised pathway retains the original article's central insight but gives each link a concrete indicator. Digital encounter is observable when learning materials represent more than one social or religious position and disclose their sources (Wineburg et al., 2022). Dialogue is observable when participants can ask questions and respond without being silenced or assigned to represent an entire community (Geurts et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). Critical reflection is observable in revised claims, written explanations of changed assumptions and reasoned acknowledgment of uncertainty (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Sortwell et al., 2024). Collaboration is observable in a shared task in which responsibilities and contributions are equitably distributed (Geurts et al., 2024). Identity security is observable in students' reported ability to remain faithful to their convictions without institutional penalty, while inclusion is observable through fair participation and respectful treatment (Harjatanaya, 2025; Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023; Utami, 2022). None of these outcomes should be inferred only from the presence of an internet-connected classroom (UNESCO, 2023).

An effective lesson may therefore begin with a documented, age-appropriate social issue, not with an abstract request that students 'be tolerant' (Sirry et al., 2024). In Indonesia, a class might analyze anonymized school-uniform policy scenarios, examining who may be affected, what interests compete and which procedures would be fair. In a digital activity, students might compare how multiple reliable sources describe the same religious controversy, noting omissions, inflammatory language and unsupported inferences (Wineburg et al., 2022; Cho et al., 2025). A facilitated discussion would allow religious commitments to be stated without compelling declarations of personal belief (Utami, 2022; Harjatanaya, 2025). The follow-up task could ask groups to design transparent school guidelines or a respectful public-information product. This sequence turns coexistence into an analytical and civic skill while keeping the curricular goals of religious learning visible (Sirry et al., 2024).

The teacher's responsibility is not to declare every belief equivalent. In religious education, students may learn and affirm specific theological commitments; in multicultural learning, they must also recognize the equal human dignity and educational rights of peers with different commitments (Utami, 2022; Harjatanaya, 2025). These objectives are analytically distinct but compatible. Confusion between them can produce two avoidable errors: diluting content to avoid disagreement or permitting discriminatory treatment in the name of conviction (Sirry et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). Identity-preserving inclusion instead separates the integrity of belief from the legitimacy of harm. Students may disagree about theological truth claims while being required to observe shared rules against humiliation, coercion and exclusion (UNESCO, 2024). This distinction makes inclusion compatible with serious religious learning rather than reducing it to celebratory diversity (Utami, 2022; Afifuddin et al., 2025; Harjatanaya, 2025).

The model also requires a deliberate approach to assessment. Tests focused on memorization alone will not reveal whether students can evaluate a misleading online religious claim or negotiate a dispute fairly (Wineburg et al., 2022; Sortwell et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2025). Reflective journals, source-comparison rubrics and group-dialogue

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records can assess the processes the framework regards as crucial (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Miškolci et al., 2026). Suitable rubrics distinguish evidence quality, respectful response, capacity to restate another position accurately and reasons for a conclusion (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Miškolci et al., 2026). However, assessment should not demand public self-disclosure of private faith commitments or treat reluctant participation as evidence of intolerance (Geurts et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). It should assess demonstrated academic and civic skills, not whether a student has adopted an expected religious identity (Utami, 2022; Sirry et al., 2024).

Schools can further strengthen the pathway through staff development and policy audits (OECD, 2023; Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023). Teacher training should combine digital source-checking, classroom-dialogue facilitation, minority-sensitive pedagogy, response to online harassment and understanding of students' rights (McGrew & Byrne, 2022; Sirry et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Administrators should examine uniform rules, access to religious teaching, extracurricular procedures and grievance processes with affected stakeholders (OECD, 2023; Harjatanaya, 2025). Written policies should identify who can request accommodation, what evidence is considered, how decisions are explained and how students may appeal without retaliation (Geurts et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2024). These proposals derive from patterns in the documentary cases; they are recommendations requiring local feasibility testing rather than practices proven effective in the present study.

Families and community organizations remain part of the educational ecology, but their involvement requires careful boundary-setting (Ma et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). Students may encounter a more homogeneous religious environment at home than at school or vice versa. Parent engagement can help clarify the purpose of cross-cultural learning and reduce the mistaken impression that contact with difference requires abandoning faith (Ma et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). At the same time, families and community leaders should not be given an unchecked veto over other children's equal participation (United Nations, 1989); UNESCO, 2024). Schools are responsible for maintaining fair learning conditions while listening respectfully to community concerns. Collaboration must therefore be structured by transparency and accountability, not by the assumption that all local preferences are compatible with educational rights (OECD, 2023; Harjatanaya, 2025).

The global comparison further indicates that digital responsibility extends beyond school gates. European policy discussions under the Digital Services Act highlight questions about online platforms' design, safeguards for minors and the transparency of systemic risks (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2022; European Commission, 2025a, 2025b). For Indonesia, these debates suggest the relevance of platform-aware media education, not the automatic transplant of an EU regulatory framework (UNESCO, 2023; European Commission, 2025a). A locally valid response must consider Indonesian legal arrangements, religious institutions, linguistic diversity, connectivity gaps and school-level resources (UNESCO, 2023; Harjatanaya, 2025). The comparative lesson is methodological: global policy concepts should be adapted through attention to local evidence, rather than

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being presented as universal educational solutions (Harjatanaya, 2025; Nielsen & Lemire, 2026).

UNESCO's warnings about technology and inequality also caution against universalizing a high-connectivity classroom as the ideal model (UNESCO, 2023). Schools with limited bandwidth or devices can still teach critical evaluation through printed screenshots, offline media samples and teacher-guided discussion. Inclusion is not restricted to expensive digital infrastructure. If a digital curriculum presumes resources that some students lack, it may reproduce inequality while claiming to democratize access (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). The pathway should therefore specify low-tech equivalents of source comparison, role-based discussion and collaborative inquiry. The underlying mechanism is reflective engagement with difference under fair conditions, not dependence on a particular application (Xiao et al., 2026).

For applied policy research, it is useful to distinguish output, outcome and impact (OECD, 2023). Outputs include completed teacher training sessions, adopted safeguarding rules and classroom tasks requiring evidence evaluation. Outcomes include improved reasoning in student work, reduced reported fear of expressing identity and more equitable participation in observed discussion. Longer-term impacts might involve lower incidence of discriminatory behavior or stronger cross-group cooperation, but these would require longitudinal, independently collected evidence (Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023; Nielsen & Lemire, 2026). The present documentary analysis documents the need for these indicators; it does not claim to have measured them. Explicit indicators will enable future studies to move beyond broad endorsements of moderation or tolerance to assess which components actually make a difference (Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023; Nielsen & Lemire, 2026).

The combined cases suggest that a tension often described as 'religious identity versus inclusion' is frequently produced by the design of school and digital environments rather than by an unavoidable logical contradiction (Utami, 2022; Harjatanaya, 2025). Where identity is controlled by coercive administrative practices, difference becomes a compliance problem (Human Rights Watch, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Where online material is consumed without critical mediation, difference can be turned into a sensational boundary (Van Bavel et al., 2024). Where students encounter diverse claims through protected, evidence-based dialogue and fair institutional procedures, there is a plausible route to both identity continuity and civic respect (Sirry et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025; Xiao et al., 2026). The data do not prove that the latter always succeeds; they provide a theoretically grounded explanation for why implementation conditions matter and how they should be studied (Nielsen & Lemire, 2026).

An important negative-case consideration is that schools may offer guided dialogue and still experience conflict. Family attitudes, political polarization, unequal school resources, local histories and platform affordances can override a single curricular intervention (Ma et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). A student may demonstrate high digital literacy while rejecting an invitation to discuss sensitive beliefs, and such reluctance is not automatically a failure of inclusion (Geurts et al., 2024; Harjatanaya, 2025). These complexities reinforce the need for multi-level evaluation, teacher discretion and safeguards for nonparticipation in identity-

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exposing activities (Mezzanotte & Calvel, 2023; Geurts et al., 2024; Nielsen & Lemire, 2026). They also prevent the proposed model from becoming a universal checklist detached from context. The model is a set of plausible conditions to be tested, not a technological or pedagogical guarantee (UNESCO, 2023; Nielsen & Lemire, 2026).

The study thus extends the original conceptual pathway in three respects. It places documented Indonesian school controversies at the center of the problem rather than treating diversity as an abstract condition. It specifies the difference between online information exposure and critically mediated religious learning, drawing on published digital-literacy evidence and global platform governance. Finally, it embeds classroom processes within school rules, complaint mechanisms and student rights. This integrated, conditional framework connects religious education, social identity and multicultural learning while preserving the distinction between doctrinal difference and civic equality. It also offers a practical foundation for future empirical observation, policy assessment and comparative research in plural societies.

CONCLUSION

This documentary multiple-case study examined how religious identity and inclusion interact in the digitally connected Indonesian educational context. In response to the first objective, the analysis found recurring tensions between formal commitments to tolerance and heterogeneous school rules, between expanding sources of online religious authority and limited opportunities for critical interpretation, and between the aspiration to include difference and institutional practices that may require conformity. Documented disputes concerning religious clothing and educational access show that inclusion cannot be inferred from curriculum statements alone. Published research on digital religious learning further indicates that internet access is not equivalent to reflective engagement. These are cross-case interpretive findings based on existing reports and studies, not findings from new interviews, classroom observations or a representative national survey.

Regarding the second objective, the article advances an identity-preserving pedagogical pathway in which source evaluation, protected dialogue, reflective reasoning and equitable collaboration operate alongside fair school rules, rights-respecting accommodation and accountable response to exclusion. The central theoretical implication is that technology mediates opportunities for interaction but does not independently determine inclusion; the relevant mechanisms depend on educational and institutional arrangements. The Western and global comparison reinforces the importance of recognizing school minorities and of addressing platform-level risks while avoiding the uncritical transplantation of secular or regulatory frameworks to Indonesia. Inclusion does not demand theological uniformity: students may maintain distinct religious commitments while learning to respect equal rights and to disagree without coercion.

The practical priority is to evaluate actual school rules, classroom practices and digital-learning tasks, rather than counting devices or repeating generic tolerance slogans. Policymakers and schools should develop source-verification activities, dialogue safeguards,

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transparent accommodation procedures and indicators of participation and student safety. The study is limited by dependence on public documentary evidence, uneven case reporting, variable survey populations and a lack of first-hand longitudinal observation. Future research should undertake comparative fieldwork in public and religious schools across different Indonesian regions, combining classroom observation, teacher and student interviews, policy-document audits and measures of reflective dialogue. Such work would establish whether the proposed mechanisms produce durable inclusion and under which conditions religious identity remains secure.

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