



### ENGAGING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN A MULTIRELIGIOUS PRIVATE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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#### ABSTRACT

*Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in Indonesia is expected not only to nurture students' faith but also to prepare them to live with religious difference. This study explores how IRE is practiced, and what challenges it faces, in SMK Yadika Baturaja, a private vocational school founded by a non-Muslim foundation in which 91.56% of the students are Muslim and the remainder are Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected from July 2022 to August 2023 through participant observation, in-depth interviews with seven purposively selected informants, and documentation, and were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. Edward III's policy implementation model was used as the analytical lens for reading the school's compliance with Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation (PMA) No. 16/2010. The findings show that the school engages religious diversity through three interrelated practices: (1) a faith-specific organization of religious education, in which IRE is taught Monday to Thursday by a qualified Muslim teacher while Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu education is scheduled on Friday; (2) a resource arrangement that provides a mosque, dedicated worship rooms for non-Muslim students, and scripture-based learning resources; and (3) a school culture of tolerance in which students assist one another in religious events without compromising their own convictions. The main challenges are the absence of religious education laboratories, the lack of permanent worship places for non-Muslim students, weak policy socialization, and the financial limitations of a private school. The study argues that leadership disposition and a tolerant institutional culture can compensate for resource gaps, and it offers a transferable model for IRE in multireligious schools.*

**Keywords:** *Islamic religious education; religious diversity; multireligious school; vocational school; PMA No. 16/2010*

#### INTRODUCTION

Religious education holds a distinctive place in Indonesia's national education system. It is designed not merely to transmit doctrine but to shape students' character, morality, and religious commitment, while at the same time fostering tolerance and social harmony in a society marked by deep religious plurality. For Islamic Religious Education (IRE), known in Indonesia as *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (PAI), this dual mandate is particularly consequential. As the religious education subject taken by the majority of Indonesian students, IRE is widely regarded as a key arena for cultivating religious moderation and inclusive attitudes (Adinda et al., 2025).

The legal framework for religious education is well established. Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System makes religious education a compulsory subject at every level and grants every student the right to receive religious instruction in accordance with their own faith, taught by an educator of the same religion (Susari et al., 2024). Government



Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious-Based Education further obliges every educational unit to provide religious education and adequate facilities for worship (Aseery & Alfaifi, 2024). To operationalize these mandates, the Minister of Religious Affairs issued Regulation (*Peraturan Menteri Agama*, PMA) No. 16 of 2010 on the Management of Religious Education in Schools. Comprising 12 chapters and 30 articles, the regulation covers curriculum, educators, facilities, financing, and evaluation. It stipulates that when at least 15 students of the same religion are present in one class, they must be taught by a teacher of that religion; where the number is lower, schools may collaborate with other schools or religious institutions (Al Rachimi et al., 2026).

Despite this clear framework, implementation across Indonesia remains uneven. Schools, particularly private schools with specific religious affiliations, continue to face difficulties in providing religious education for students of other faiths because of limited resources, limited socialization, or inadequate infrastructure (Aziz et al., 2025). The resulting gap between regulation and practice risks depriving students of their right to appropriate religious education. Studies of IRE and tolerance in vocational schools have generally examined state schools or schools run by Islamic foundations (Janudin et al., 2024). Much less is known about how IRE operates in a configuration that is, in a sense, inverted: a school established by a non-Muslim foundation whose student body is overwhelmingly Muslim, while also serving Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu minorities (Kurniawati & Aulia, 2025).

SMK Yadika Baturaja, a private vocational school in Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, South Sumatra, represents precisely such a configuration (Rahmat & Yahya, 2022). The school was founded by the Yadika Foundation, a non-Muslim foundation, yet 91.56% of its students are Muslim (Sholihuddin & Isroani, 2022). Despite the foundation's background, the school has consistently provided religious education according to each student's faith and employed teachers whose religion matches that of their students (Siregar & Ismaraidha, 2025). This case therefore offers a valuable setting for understanding how IRE is practiced alongside other religious education subjects and how a school engages religious diversity within the parameters of national regulation (Lubis & Mahariah, 2024).

Accordingly, this study addresses three questions: (1) How is Islamic Religious Education organized and practiced within the multireligious structure of SMK Yadika Baturaja in line with PMA No. 16/2010? (2) How does the school engage religious diversity through its religious education and institutional culture? (3) What factors support and hinder these practices? By answering these questions, the study contributes empirical evidence on IRE in multireligious private schools and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, school leaders, and religious education teachers (Maharani & Oktapiyani, 2026).

### **Islamic Religious Education and Religious Diversity**

PMA No. 16/2010 (Article 1) defines religious education as education that provides knowledge and shapes the attitudes, personality, and skills of students in practicing their religious teachings, implemented at least through subjects at all pathways, levels, and types of education. In the Indonesian context, IRE is increasingly expected to function beyond doctrinal instruction, serving as a vehicle for moderation, tolerance, and civic harmony (Thaha et al., 2025). Multicultural approaches to the IRE curriculum have been proposed to strengthen tolerance content and religious moderation (Ubaidilah et al., 2024). while



studies in vocational schools show that IRE teachers play a central role in building students' religious awareness in multicultural environments(Wahyuni et al., 2023).

International literature likewise highlights that managing religious diversity in schools requires institutional arrangements, not only curricular content. Examples include Austria's cooperation model for interreligious and religious education (Yudin et al., 2025). Malaysia's multi-religious education (Ariga, 2024). and the experience of school principals in Türkiye navigating religious diversity (Bisri et al., 2023). Broader governance and policy frameworks are also seen as crucial for sustaining tolerance in pluralistic nations(Harmi, 2022), while the role of interreligious communication in managing diversity has been underlined (Saepudin et al., 2023).

### **Managing Religious Education under PMA No. 16/2010**

Managing religious education involves planning, organizing, actuating, and controlling its components: curriculum, educators, students, facilities, financing, and evaluation. Mulyasa (2005) identifies seven components of school management: curriculum and teaching programs, educational personnel, student affairs, finance, facilities, school-community relations, and special services. PMA No. 16/2010 translates these components into specific obligations: schools must provide religious education for all students; religious education teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree (S1/D4) in religious education (Article 13); and schools must be equipped with learning resources, places of worship, media, libraries, and religious education laboratories (Article 24). Non-compliant schools may receive verbal and written warnings and ultimately lose their operational permits(Supriyadi & Kurdi, 2025).

### **Edward III's Policy Implementation Model**

To read how a school translates this regulation into practice, this study employs Edward III's (1980) policy implementation model, which identifies four interacting variables: (1) *communication*, covering the transmission, clarity, and consistency of policy information; (2) *resources*, comprising staff, information, authority, and facilities; (3) *disposition*, referring to implementers' attitudes and commitment, including staffing decisions and incentives; and (4) *bureaucratic structure*, consisting of standard operating procedures (SOPs) and the distribution of responsibilities(Al Musyarrofi & Rofiq, 2025). The model is useful here because it allows the practices of IRE and other religious education subjects to be examined systematically at the school level, while still leaving room to capture cultural dimensions such as tolerance that shape how the policy is lived(Yanti et al., 2024).

### **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative approach with a single case study design, which is suited to exploring a contemporary practice in depth within its real-life context. The research was conducted at SMK Yadika Baturaja, located at Jalan Sultan Mahmud Badarudin No. 486 B, Baturaja, Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, South Sumatra, from July 2022 to August 2023. The school was selected purposively because of its distinctive profile: a private vocational school founded by a non-Muslim foundation whose students are predominantly Muslim, with Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu minorities.



Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Seven key informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the management of religious education (Lateh et al., 2025): the principal, the curriculum coordinator, the IRE teacher, the Protestant Religious Education teacher, the Catholic Religious Education teacher, the Hindu Religious Education teacher, and the head of administration. Documents analyzed included curriculum documents (KTSP, the 2013 Curriculum, and the *Merdeka* Curriculum), teaching schedules, staff records, and the school's SOPs for religious education.

Data were analyzed with Miles and Huberman's (1992) interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Edward III's four variables were used as the analytical framework for organizing and interpreting the data. Trustworthiness was established through source and technique triangulation (comparing observation, interview, and documentary data), thick and systematic description to support transferability, and audit and consultation with supervisors to support dependability and confirmability (Mulyana, 2023).

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Religious Composition of the School Community

The school's religious composition forms the starting point for understanding how IRE operates(Kartikawati, 2019). Muslims make up 91.56% of the student body, and the remaining students are Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu(Nudin, 2018). The composition of teachers and educational staff, which is shown in Table 1, reflects a deliberate effort to match religious education teachers to the religions of the students.

**Table 1.** Religious composition of teachers and educational staff at SMK Yadika Baturaja

| Group             | Muslim | Protestant | Catholic | Hindu | Total |
|-------------------|--------|------------|----------|-------|-------|
| Teachers          | 19     | 1          | 1        | 1     | 22    |
| Educational staff | 9      | 4*         | –        | –     | 13    |

*Source: school documentation (2022–2023). \*The 4 non-Muslim staff members are recorded as Christian/Protestant.*

## Organizing IRE within a Multireligious Structure

The first practice identified is the faith-specific organization of religious education. Every student receives religious education according to his or her own faith, taught by a teacher of the same religion, in line with PMA No. 16/2010. This principle is codified in the school's SOPs for religious education, which are summarized in Table 2. IRE, which serves the majority of students, is scheduled from Monday to Thursday, whereas Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu Religious Education are scheduled on Friday. The timetable is explicitly designed so that minority students are not disadvantaged(Supandi et al., 2026).

**Table 2.** Standard operating procedures for religious education at SMK Yadika Baturaja

| No. | Procedure                                                                                     |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | Every student has the right to receive religious education according to his or her own faith. |



| No. | Procedure                                                                                                                                      |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2   | Islamic Religious Education is scheduled from Monday to Thursday; Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu Religious Education are scheduled on Friday. |
| 3   | Class schedules are arranged without discriminating against minority students.                                                                 |
| 4   | Religious education teachers must hold at least an S1/D4 degree in religious education.                                                        |
| 5   | Recruitment of religious education teachers is adjusted to the religious composition of the students.                                          |

*Source: school documentation (2022–2023).*

All religious education teachers, including the IRE teacher, meet the S1/D4 qualification required by Article 13 of PMA No. 16/2010. According to the curriculum coordinator, the regulation has been integrated into the school's curriculum documents since the KTSP era and carried through the 2013 Curriculum and the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Recruitment is conducted transparently and without discrimination, emphasizing qualification and competence rather than religious affiliation, and teachers' salaries and honoraria are paid according to teaching hours, an arrangement that teachers regard as adequate.

### **Learning Resources and Worship Facilities**

The second practice concerns the provision of resources for religious learning and worship. The school provides a mosque for Muslim students and dedicated rooms in which Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu students can worship. Learning resources include scriptures for each faith (the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Vedas), textbooks, religious reference books, magazines, and internet access. The school has access to the documents and guidelines needed to implement PMA No. 16/2010, and its authority to do so derives from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and from instructions of the Yadika Foundation, with the principal managing the religious education program at the school level. However, the school does not yet have religious education laboratories for any of the four religions (Di Placido & Palmisano, 2025).

### **Engaging Diversity through a Culture of Tolerance**

The third practice is less formal but equally important: the cultivation of a school culture of tolerance. Separate religious classes do not translate into segregation in daily school life. Teachers and students of different faiths interact routinely, and the school supports the religious activities of all faiths. During religious events, students are encouraged to help one another with practical preparations while each maintains his or her own religious convictions. In this setting, IRE is not only a space for strengthening Muslim students' faith but also part of a wider school ecosystem in which Muslim students, as the majority, learn to respect and support their minority peers (Fakhruddin et al., 2023).

This culture is sustained by the commitment of the principal and the foundation. The principal actively socialized PMA No. 16/2010 to all teachers and educational staff and emphasized that fulfilling students' right to religious education is a non-negotiable obligation of the school. The foundation's support is visible in the provision of facilities, the



recruitment of religious education teachers for each faith, and the integration of religious education into the curriculum (Kienstra et al., 2019).

### Reading the Practices through Edward III's Model

Table 3 synthesizes the findings according to Edward III's four variables. Three of the four variables, namely communication, disposition, and bureaucratic structure, are supportive, whereas resources are only partially adequate, with facilities as the main weakness.

**Table 3.** Implementation of PMA No. 16/2010 at SMK Yadika Baturaja according to Edward III's variables

| Variable               | Key findings                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Assessment                              |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Communication          | Principal socialized the regulation to all staff; the regulation is integrated into KTSP, 2013, and Merdeka Curriculum documents; provisions are clear and applied consistently since enactment.                                        | Effective                               |
| Resources              | Qualified S1/D4 teachers for each religion; access to guidelines; clear authority from the Ministry and the foundation; mosque and worship rooms available; no religious education laboratories or permanent non-Muslim worship places. | Partially adequate (facilities lacking) |
| Disposition            | Strong commitment of principal and teachers; staffing based on qualification and dedication; incentives based on teaching hours considered adequate.                                                                                    | Positive                                |
| Bureaucratic structure | Written SOPs for religious education (Table 2); clear division of responsibilities; professional cooperation among teachers of different faiths.                                                                                        | Well organized                          |

*Source: analysis of observation, interview, and documentation data.*

### Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Four factors were found to support the practices described above:

1. Competent religious education teachers. A qualified teacher is available for each religion, meeting the academic and professional requirements of PMA No. 16/2010, so every student is taught by a teacher of the same faith.
2. A culture of tolerance. Teachers and students maintain respectful relationships across religious lines, and students help one another during religious events without compromising their own beliefs.
3. Institutional commitment. The Yadika Foundation and the principal are committed to the regulation, as reflected in facility provision, teacher recruitment, and curriculum integration.
4. Industry partnerships. Partnerships with companies such as Honda Maju Mobilindo, Auto 2000, and PT Astra International Isuzu provide practical benefits for students and



motivate parents of all faiths to enroll their children, sustaining the school's diverse student body (Kolb, 2021).

Four factors were found to hinder them:

1. No religious education laboratories. The school has no laboratory for Islamic, Protestant, Catholic, or Hindu Religious Education, which limits the practical dimension of religious learning, including worship practice in IRE (Levitt & Woodhead, 2018).
2. No permanent worship places for non-Muslim students. Dedicated rooms are available, but there are no permanent churches or temples; building a *pura* for Hindu students is particularly difficult because of its traditional requirements and rituals.
3. Weak socialization from the government. PMA No. 16/2010 has not been widely socialized in the region, and many schools in Baturaja and South Sumatra have not implemented it because of limited information and guidance.
4. Financial constraints. As a private school, SMK Yadika Baturaja depends on its own resources and the foundation's support, with no government funding for religious education infrastructure.

### **IRE in an Inverted Majority-Minority Configuration**

The case of SMK Yadika Baturaja shows that the religious identity of a school's founding body does not determine the quality of its religious education provision. In this inverted configuration, a non-Muslim foundation provides a qualified Muslim teacher, a mosque, and four days of scheduled IRE for its Muslim majority, while also guaranteeing faith-specific education for Protestant, Catholic, and Hindu minorities. This contrasts with reports of private schools that fail to serve students of other faiths (Moyaert, 2019) and it suggests that the rights-based logic of PMA No. 16/2010 can be internalized regardless of institutional affiliation. The arrangement resembles cooperation models observed internationally, in which the state sets standards while schools accommodate each community's religious education needs (Liljestrand, 2018)

### **From Separate Classes to Shared Tolerance**

A common concern about faith-specific religious education is that it may reinforce boundaries between religious groups. The findings suggest a more nuanced picture. At SMK Yadika Baturaja, separation is confined to instruction, whereas school life is shared. Students attend their own religious lessons but assist one another during religious events, a practice that mirrors what Prasetya et al. (2024) describe as symbolic interaction among interreligious actors in managing diversity. For IRE, this means that the tolerance values taught in the curriculum (Vilà Baños et al., 2019) are reinforced by lived experience with religious others. IRE thus contributes to religious moderation not only through content but through the institutional context in which it is taught (Salim et al., 2026).

### **Disposition as a Compensating Resource**

Read through Edward III's model, the most notable finding is that strong disposition and a clear bureaucratic structure compensate for weak physical resources. The principal's proactive socialization and the foundation's commitment ensured compliance even though the school lacks laboratories and permanent worship places for non-Muslim students. This supports the view that school leaders are central actors in navigating religious diversity



(Kuyurtar & Tabancalı, 2026) and that governance frameworks, rather than resources alone, sustain tolerance (Faojin et al., 2023). At the same time, disposition cannot fully substitute for infrastructure. Article 24 of PMA No. 16/2010 explicitly requires religious education laboratories and places of worship, and the school's alternative arrangements do not yet meet this standard (Bazikh, 2024).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings carry several implications. For policymakers, weak socialization of PMA No. 16/2010 in South Sumatra indicates that issuing a regulation is not enough; sustained dissemination and technical guidance are needed, especially for private schools. The absence of public funding for religious education infrastructure in private schools also places the burden of compliance on foundations, which may explain uneven implementation elsewhere (Sofanudin, 2019). For school leaders, the case demonstrates that written SOPs, non-discriminatory timetabling, and qualification-based recruitment are low-cost measures that substantially improve compliance. For IRE teachers, the case highlights the value of connecting classroom teaching on tolerance to shared school activities in which students experience diversity directly (Hasan, 2025).

### **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the practices and challenges of Islamic Religious Education in SMK Yadika Baturaja, a multireligious private vocational school founded by a non-Muslim foundation. The school engages religious diversity through a faith-specific organization of religious education, the provision of worship facilities and learning resources for each faith, and a culture of tolerance in which students support one another across religious lines. Viewed through Edward III's model, communication, disposition, and bureaucratic structure support the implementation of PMA No. 16/2010, while resources, particularly facilities, remain the main constraint. Competent teachers, a tolerant culture, institutional commitment, and industry partnerships support these practices; the absence of religious education laboratories, the lack of permanent worship places for non-Muslim students, weak government socialization, and financial constraints hinder them. Four recommendations follow. First, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should intensify the socialization of PMA No. 16/2010 and provide technical assistance to schools. Second, the Ministry and local governments should allocate funding for religious education infrastructure in private schools. Third, SMK Yadika Baturaja should continue to develop its facilities, particularly religious education laboratories and permanent worship places for non-Muslim students. Fourth, other schools, especially those with diverse student bodies, can adapt the school's SOP-based and tolerance-oriented model. This study is limited to a single school and relies primarily on the perspectives of school leaders, teachers, and administrators. Future research could compare several multireligious schools, incorporate the voices of students and parents, and examine the long-term effects of such practices on students' religious attitudes and social harmony.

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