



KEY ROLES OF FEMALE ULAMA IN DEVELOPING MULTICULTURAL ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN MANADO, INDONESIA

Arhanuddin Salim^(✉), Adri Lundeto, Muh. Idris, Amiruddin, Rahman Mantu
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Manado, North Sulawesi, Indonesia

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✉Correspondence to:

arhanuddinsalim@gmail.com

Abstract: This study aimed to examine the key roles of female ulama in developing multicultural Islamic education in Manado City, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, where Muslims live as a religious minority within a Christian-majority society. This research employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the educational practices of female religious leaders in community settings. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen female ulama, participant observation of religious learning activities, and document analysis of teaching materials and digital *da'wah* content. The findings indicated that female ulama played significant roles as community-based Islamic educators who construct persuasive and contextual religious authority within non-formal educational spaces. Their educational activities were conducted through *Qur'anic* study circles, women's religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*), family and parenting education, digital religious teaching, and participation in community interaction. These practices promote values of religious moderation, tolerance, civic responsibility, and social harmony in a multicultural environment. The study also showed that female ulama actively responded to conservative and exclusive religious narratives by providing contextual explanations and encouraging reflective understanding of Islamic teachings. The findings implied that female religious educators played an important role in strengthening inclusive Islamic education and promoting social harmony in minority Muslim contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic education in Indonesia has long been understood not only as a system of religious instruction but also as a social and cultural process that shapes religious understanding, moral formation, citizenship awareness, and interfaith relations within a plural society (C. L. Ducworth, 2024; Faiz et al., 2023). In a multicultural nation like Indonesia, Islamic education played an important role in fostering religious understanding that supported peaceful

coexistence among diverse religious communities. Consequently, contemporary discussions on Islamic education increasingly emphasize the integration of religious learning with values of tolerance, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Fanshurna & Isnadi, 2025). Within this perspective, Islamic education is expected to contribute not only to religious literacy but also to the cultivation of social harmony in plural social contexts (Japar et al., 2024; Jarmer, 2024).

However, the practice of Islamic education faces significant challenges in contemporary Indonesian society. The rapid circulation of religious interpretations through digital media, transnational networks, and informal learning channels has contributed to the emergence of conservative and exclusivist narratives that sometimes contradict the principles of pluralism and social coexistence (Lokmic-Tomkins et al., 2025; Lwamba et al., 2023). These dynamics create new challenges for Islamic educators, particularly in communities where Muslims interact closely with people from different religious backgrounds (Murtianingsih & Sujito, 2025; Nadia & Faizah, 2024). In such contexts, Islamic education is required to respond adaptively to social diversity while maintaining the integrity of Islamic teachings (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2023; Rahman, 2023).

These challenges become more complex in regions where Muslims constitute a religious minority. Manado City in North Sulawesi represents one of the distinctive contexts in Indonesia where Muslims live within a Christian-majority society. In this environment, Islamic education cannot rely solely on formal institutions such as madrasas or Islamic schools. Instead, Islamic learning often takes place in non-formal and informal educational spaces such as *Qur'anic* study circles, women's religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*), community discussions, and digital religious platforms. These spaces function as important arenas for transmitting Islamic knowledge while simultaneously nurturing attitudes of coexistence and mutual respect.

This study addressed this gap by examining the role of female ulama in developing multicultural Islamic education in Manado. In this research, female ulama are understood not merely as religious authorities or preachers, but as community-based Islamic educators who transmit religious knowledge and ethical values through everyday pedagogical practices. Their activities included teaching in women's study groups, providing family and parenting education, mentoring youth, conducting digital *da'wah*, and participating in interfaith interactions (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2023). These practices represented forms of Islamic education that are embedded in social relations and community life.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of multicultural Islamic education in responding to religious diversity. Research by Hasanuddin et al. (2025) and Otsuki (2025) emphasized that Islamic education in plural societies must integrate values of tolerance and social inclusion. Similarly, BR & Tarmidiyono (2023) and Musayev (2024) demonstrated that Islamic education in minority Muslim contexts often emphasizes relational ethics and contextual interpretation of religious teachings. Meanwhile, studies on women's religious

authority in Indonesia (Fajar, 2024 and Sirichuenvichit & Prarokijjak, 2025) reveal that female religious leaders play an increasingly significant role in community-based Islamic education, particularly in family and grassroots contexts. These studies suggested that women's involvement in Islamic education contributes to the transmission of ethical and socially responsive religious knowledge.

This study provided new empirical insights into the key roles of female ulama in developing multicultural Islamic education within a Muslim minority context. While previous studies have examined women's religious authority, Islamic education, or multicultural education as separate themes, limited research has specifically explored how female ulama function as educators who actively cultivate multicultural values in everyday religious learning practices. By focusing on Manado, a city where Muslims live within a Christian-majority society, this research highlights how female ulama perform several key roles as community-based Islamic educators, facilitators of multicultural interaction, and mediators of religious narratives within local communities. Through these roles, female ulama contribute to the development of inclusive Islamic education that promotes tolerance, respectful interreligious relations, and social harmony. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on the pedagogical roles of female ulama in shaping multicultural Islamic education in a minority Muslim environment.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to examine the key roles of female ulama in multicultural Islamic education within a minority Muslim context. The research was conducted in Manado City, North Sulawesi, Indonesia, where Muslims live as a minority within a Christian-majority society. The participants consisted of fifteen female ulama who are actively involved in community-based Islamic educational activities, such as women's religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*), *Qur'anic* study circles, family education programs, youth mentoring, and digital religious teaching. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had relevant experience as religious educators in community settings. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation during selected religious learning activities, and document analysis of teaching materials and digital religious content shared by the participants (Morgan, 2024; Ragin, 2024; Tracy, 2024).

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure to identify patterns related to educational roles, learning spaces, and strategies used by female ulama in promoting multicultural Islamic education. The analysis involved several stages, including data familiarization, initial coding, categorization of codes into thematic patterns, and interpretation of themes in relation to the research objectives. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was also conducted with several participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretations. Ethical considerations were

observed throughout the research process by ensuring informed consent and maintaining the confidentiality of participants' identities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the empirical findings of the study based on data obtained from in-depth interviews with fifteen female ulama, participant observation, and document analysis. The participants consisted of female religious educators actively involved in community-based Islamic education in several districts of Manado City. These educators represented diverse backgrounds, including leaders of women's (*Ibu Nyai*) religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*), *Qur'anic* teachers, community preachers, and digital Islamic educators. Analysis of the data revealed several key roles performed by female ulama in developing multicultural Islamic education in Manado. These key roles included functioning as community-based Islamic educators, facilitators of multicultural interaction, and mediators of religious narratives. Table 1 summarizes the main roles of female ulama and the educational activities associated with these roles.

Table 1. Key Roles of Female Ulama in Developing Multicultural Islamic Education in Manado

Role of Female Ulama	Educational Activities	Educational Values Promoted
Community-based Islamic educator	<i>Majelis taklim</i> , <i>Qur'anic</i> study circles, family and parenting education, religious lectures, and digital religious learning	Religious knowledge, moral guidance, character formation
Facilitator of multicultural interaction	Community dialogue, participation in neighborhood activities, and discussions on interreligious relations	Tolerance, mutual respect, and social harmony
Mediator of religious narratives	Clarifying religious teachings from social media, responding to conservative interpretations, and guiding reflective discussions	Critical thinking, balanced religious understanding, and religious moderation

Female Ulama as Community-Based Islamic Educators

Field data from interviews and observations indicated that female ulama in Manado primarily function as community-based Islamic educators whose roles are closely connected with everyday social life. Their educational activities were not limited to formal religious institutions but were conducted within community settings that allowed continuous interaction with learners. Through various non-formal gatherings and informal educational encounters, these female religious educators actively guide religious learning processes among women, families, and young people.

Most participants explained that their educational roles developed organically from within the community rather than through formal appointments. Over time, community members began to trust them with religious teaching responsibilities because of their consistent involvement in educational activities, their ability to communicate religious messages clearly,

and their attentiveness to local community needs. Informant 2, for example, explained that her involvement in religious education initially began by assisting several women in learning to read the Qur'an. As the gatherings continued, community members gradually asked her to provide explanations on broader religious matters, family issues, and everyday challenges faced by Muslims living in the local social environment. This pattern of community recognition was consistently found across different neighborhoods and organizational backgrounds. Female ulama were perceived not merely as speakers or preachers, but as educators who accompany learners over time. Community members frequently consulted them on religious practices, family issues, and social concerns, indicating a strong relationship of trust between educators and learners.

Observational data showed that women's religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*) serve as the primary educational space for female ulama. These gatherings are typically held regularly and attended by women of varying ages and educational backgrounds. Within these settings, learning activities include *Qur'anic* reading, discussions on basic Islamic teachings, reflections on moral behavior, and conversations about everyday social experiences. The learning atmosphere is generally informal, interactive, and dialogical, allowing participants to share experiences and ask questions freely. In addition to conducting face-to-face learning activities in community gatherings, several female ulama also extend their educational roles into family and household contexts. Informants reported that they frequently provide guidance related to parenting, marital relationships, and children's religious education. These educational interactions often take place through personal conversations, home visits, or small group discussions within the community. Informant 7 explained that many mothers seek advice not only on religious matters but also on how to raise their children as practicing Muslims while maintaining respectful relationships with neighbors from different religious backgrounds.

Digital platforms also played an important role in supporting community-based Islamic education. Several female ulama actively use messaging applications and social media to maintain contact with learners who are unable to attend gatherings regularly. Educational content shared through these platforms includes short religious reminders, explanations of religious practices, and responses to questions raised by community members. Field observations indicate that these digital interactions complement face-to-face learning and help sustain continuity in educational engagement. Importantly, the educational roles of female ulama extend beyond exclusively Muslim learning spaces. Several informants described their active participation in broader community activities that involve individuals from different religious backgrounds, including neighborhood meetings, social programs, and collective community initiatives. In these settings, female ulama do not deliver formal religious instruction; however, their presence and conduct are often perceived by community members as reflecting Islamic values in everyday social interaction. Informant 10 noted that educational influence is not limited to religious study circles, but can

also emerge through collaborative community activities, where people learn from observing attitudes and behavior during shared social engagement.

The findings also indicated that female ulama adapt their educational approaches to the multicultural environment of Manado. Informants emphasized the importance of careful language use, respectful communication, and sensitivity to social contexts. They reported avoiding expressions that might create misunderstanding or tension, particularly when discussing religious differences. Instead, they focus on shared social values such as respect, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. Overall, the empirical data demonstrated that female ulama in Manado operate as community-based Islamic educators whose pedagogical roles are embedded in daily social interactions. Their educational practices were characterized by relational engagement, flexibility, and responsiveness to community needs. Through non-formal gatherings, family-oriented education, digital communication, and everyday social participation, female ulama contribute to the transmission of Islamic knowledge and values in ways that are closely aligned with the realities of a multicultural and minority Muslim context.

Female Ulama as Facilitator of Multicultural Interaction

Field data indicated that Islamic educational activities conducted by female ulama in Manado take place across a variety of learning spaces that are flexible, accessible, and closely connected to community life. These educational spaces extend beyond formal religious institutions and are embedded in everyday environments where Muslim communities interact and learn collectively. The diversity of learning spaces allows female ulama to reach different segments of the community and to adapt educational activities to varying social contexts. Women's religious gatherings (*majelis taklim*) constitute the most prominent educational space identified in this study. These gatherings are organized regularly in mosques, prayer rooms, and private homes, depending on the availability of facilities and the preferences of participants. Observations show that these gatherings are attended primarily by women, including housewives, informal workers, and elderly community members. Learning activities typically begin with Qur'anic recitation, followed by explanations of basic Islamic teachings and open discussions on everyday religious and social issues.

The learning atmosphere within *majelis taklim* is generally informal and participatory. Participants are encouraged to ask questions, share personal experiences, and discuss issues related to family life, religious practices, and everyday social interaction. Female ulama facilitate these learning sessions by guiding discussions and responding to participants' questions using accessible and understandable language. Informant 5 explained that the gatherings are not conducted in a rigid classroom format; instead, participants sit together, discuss their daily concerns, and learn collectively while the female ulama provide explanations and guidance related to religious teachings. In addition to group gatherings, *Qur'anic* study circles focusing on reading and understanding the

Qur'an are commonly conducted. These sessions involve smaller groups and are often tailored to participants' abilities, particularly for women who are still learning to read the Qur'an. Educational activities in these settings emphasize repetition, mutual support, and gradual learning progress. Observational data indicate that female ulama play a central role in creating a supportive learning environment that encourages participation without fear of embarrassment or judgment.

Family-oriented educational activities also constitute an important component of Islamic learning spaces. Several informants reported that they frequently provide religious guidance through home visits, informal counseling, and small group discussions that focus on parenting, marital relationships, and children's religious education. These activities are often initiated by community members who seek advice on how to practice Islamic teachings while living in a multicultural social environment. Informant 8 explained that mothers in the community occasionally invite her to their homes to discuss strategies for teaching religious values to their children while maintaining respectful relationships with neighbors from different religious backgrounds.

Digital platforms serve as additional educational spaces that complement face-to-face learning activities. Female ulama utilize messaging applications and social media to share religious messages, answer questions, and provide reminders related to Islamic practices. Educational content distributed through digital platforms includes short reflections, audio recordings, written messages, and announcements about upcoming learning activities. Field data showed that digital learning spaces are particularly important for participants who are unable to attend gatherings regularly due to work or family responsibilities.

Observations also reveal that learning activities occasionally take place within broader community settings that include non-Muslim participants, such as neighborhood meetings, social programs, and mutual assistance activities. In these contexts, Islamic education is not delivered through formal instruction but is reflected in the conduct, communication style, and participation of female ulama. Their presence in such activities contributes to informal learning about Islamic values through everyday interaction rather than explicit teaching. Across these diverse learning spaces, educational activities are characterized by flexibility and responsiveness to community needs. Female ulama adjust the content, duration, and format of learning activities according to participants' circumstances and social contexts. This adaptability enables Islamic education to remain accessible and relevant in a multicultural and minority Muslim setting.

Overall, the findings demonstrated that educational spaces utilized by female ulama in Manado are dynamic and interconnected. *Majelis taklim*, *Qur'anic* study circles, family-based education, digital platforms, and community activities collectively form an integrated network of learning spaces. Through these spaces, female ulama facilitate Islamic education that is continuous, inclusive, and closely aligned with the realities of community life in Manado. Analysis of interview and observational data indicated that the educational content delivered by female ulama in Manado focused on practical religious

knowledge and ethical guidance relevant to daily life. Common themes included basic Islamic teachings, family and parenting education, moral behavior, social responsibility, and peaceful coexistence with people of other faiths.

Many informants emphasized that they intentionally avoid delivering confrontational or exclusive religious messages during their educational activities. Instead, they focus on promoting understanding, patience, and mutual respect in social relationships. Informant 6 explained that living in Manado requires Muslims to interact regularly with people from different religious backgrounds; therefore, in her teaching sessions, consistently reminds participants that maintaining good manners and showing respect toward others are integral parts of Islamic values. As a result, educational discussions frequently address practical challenges faced by Muslim families in a Christian-majority environment, including how to participate in community events, maintain religious identity, and respond constructively to differing religious practices without creating social tension.

One of the most frequently addressed themes is basic Islamic practice, including prayer, Qur'anic reading, fasting, and daily religious obligations. Female ulama provide step-by-step explanations and practical guidance, particularly for participants with limited formal religious education. Observations indicate that learning activities often revisit foundational religious topics to ensure understanding and continuity, especially for elderly participants and those who are new to organized religious learning.

Family and parenting education also emerges as a prominent theme within many educational activities conducted by female ulama. Several informants reported that discussions during learning sessions frequently involve issues related to child upbringing, maintaining harmonious family relationships, and fostering moral behavior within the household. Educational conversations often focus on how parents can instill Islamic values in their children while living in a socially diverse environment. Informant 4 explained that many participants tend to raise questions concerning family matters, particularly regarding ways to teach children how to perform religious practices, discuss religious beliefs appropriately, and encourage attitudes of respect toward others.

Moral behavior and social ethics also feature prominently in educational content. Female ulama consistently emphasize honesty, patience, humility, and respect in daily interactions. Learning activities often involve discussions of real-life situations faced by participants, such as workplace relationships, neighborhood interactions, and participation in community events. These discussions allow learners to reflect on how Islamic values can be applied in concrete social contexts. Another important theme identified in the findings is guidance on social interaction within a Christian-majority environment. Educational content frequently includes discussions on how to respond to religious differences, participate in social events, and maintain respectful relationships with non-Muslim neighbors. Female ulama encourage learners to approach such situations calmly and thoughtfully, focusing on maintaining good relations without compromising personal religious commitments.

In addition, several informants reported addressing questions related to religious information encountered through social media and informal networks. Participants often bring forward religious messages, videos, or teachings they receive online and ask for clarification. Female ulama respond by explaining these messages in accessible terms and discussing their relevance to local conditions. This practice allows educational sessions to function as spaces for clarification and reflection rather than passive reception of information. Overall, the educational content delivered by female ulama in Manado is characterized by its practical orientation, responsiveness to learners' concerns, and emphasis on ethical guidance. These themes reflect an educational approach that prioritizes relevance, clarity, and applicability in everyday life within a multicultural setting.

Female Ulama as Mediator of Religious Narratives

Field findings show that female ulama in Manado adopted adaptive and context-sensitive approaches in delivering Islamic education. Rather than emphasizing symbolic distinctions, they highlighted shared social values such as mutual respect, cooperation, and community harmony. Several informants described their involvement in neighborhood activities that included non-Muslim residents. In these contexts, they positioned themselves as community members who demonstrate Islamic values through everyday behavior rather than through formal preaching. Informant 11 explained that educational influence does not always occur through sermons; instead, it can also emerge through positive attitudes and respectful conduct in daily interactions, which allow others to observe the ethical teachings of Islam in practice.

This approach was reflected in observation notes, where female ulama were seen engaging in dialogue, listening to community concerns, and avoiding religious language that could trigger misunderstanding. The findings indicate that female ulama in Manado adopted context-sensitive approaches when engaging with multicultural interaction, both within educational activities and in broader community life. Their approaches are shaped by an awareness of social diversity and the need to maintain harmonious relationships in a Christian-majority environment.

During educational sessions, female ulama demonstrate careful language use and communication styles that seek to avoid expressions that might lead to misunderstanding or discomfort. Several informants reported that they intentionally use inclusive language and emphasize shared social values when discussing religious issues related to interfaith interaction. Informant 12 explained that careful communication is essential in a multicultural environment, noting that participants are often reminded to speak politely and avoid making judgments about others to maintain respectful relationships within the community.

Observational data showed that learning activities often include discussions on everyday encounters with people of different religious backgrounds. Participants share experiences related to neighborhood relations,

workplace interactions, and community events. Female ulama facilitate these discussions by encouraging reflection and mutual understanding, allowing participants to learn from one another's experiences. Outside formal learning environments, female ulama are also actively involved in various community activities that include both Muslim and non-Muslim residents. These activities range from neighborhood meetings and social assistance programs to communal celebrations. In these contexts, female ulama do not deliver explicit religious instruction; rather, their participation reflects values of cooperation and respectful interaction within the broader community. Informant 9 explained that collaborative community activities often become informal learning opportunities, as community members observe attitudes and behaviors that reflect Islamic ethical values.

The findings also reveal that female ulama encourage learners to navigate religious differences with confidence and calmness. Educational discussions emphasize the importance of maintaining personal religious practices while showing respect for others' beliefs. Participants are encouraged to seek peaceful solutions when encountering misunderstandings or differences in religious practice. In some cases, female ulama act as informal mediators when minor misunderstandings arise within the community. Informants described situations where they were asked to help clarify issues or provide guidance to prevent tension. These interventions are typically carried out through personal conversations rather than public statements, reflecting a preference for discreet and relational approaches.

Overall, the approaches to multicultural interaction adopted by female ulama are characterized by adaptability, attentiveness to social context, and an emphasis on respectful engagement. Through both educational activities and everyday social participation, female ulama contribute to learning processes that support peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding in Manado's multicultural society. The data also reveal that female ulama encountered conservative and exclusive religious narratives circulating within their communities, often through digital media. Several informants acknowledged that some community members were exposed to rigid interpretations of religion from external sources. In responding to these issues, female ulama tend to address them through educational discussions rather than confrontation. They provide alternative explanations, encourage critical reflection, and emphasize a balanced understanding of religious practice. Informant 14 explained that when participants bring religious teachings that appear overly strict, the issue is usually discussed calmly, and participants are encouraged to reflect on whether such interpretations are appropriate for the local social context in which they live.

This strategy was observed to reduce tension within learning groups and maintain an atmosphere of openness and dialogue. Field data indicated that female ulama in Manado increasingly encounter conservative and exclusive religious narratives circulating within their communities. These narratives are primarily accessed through digital media, informal study groups, and personal

networks, rather than through formal religious institutions. Informants reported that community members, particularly women and youth, often receive religious messages, videos, or sermons that promote rigid interpretations of religious practices and social relations.

Several informants explained that such narratives are usually introduced into learning spaces through questions raised by participants during religious gatherings. Participants often seek clarification after encountering teachings that they perceive as confusing, overly strict, or inconsistent with local social realities. Informant 1 explained that many mothers often seek advice not only on religious matters but also on how to educate their children to practice Islamic values while maintaining respectful relationships with people of different religions. Rather than addressing these narratives through confrontation or condemnation, female ulama adopt educational and dialogical responses. Informants emphasized the importance of maintaining a calm and open learning atmosphere when discussing sensitive issues. During educational sessions, they invite participants to explain what they have heard and why it raises concern. This approach allows learning activities to function as spaces for reflection and clarification rather than debate.

Observational data showed that female ulama often respond to conservative narratives by providing alternative explanations grounded in everyday religious practice. They focus on helping participants understand religious teachings in relation to daily life, family responsibilities, and social interaction within a multicultural environment. Informant 6 explained that rather than directly labeling certain religious teachings as incorrect, she encourages participants to reflect critically on whether such interpretations are suitable for their local context and how they might influence social relationships within the community.

In several cases, female ulama addressed exclusive narratives that discouraged social interaction with people of different religious backgrounds. Informants reported that some community members expressed anxiety about participating in neighborhood activities or social events due to fear of violating religious boundaries. Female ulama responded by facilitating discussions that emphasized the importance of maintaining good social relations while upholding personal religious practices. These discussions often included sharing personal experiences and practical examples rather than issuing prescriptive instructions. Digital communication also plays a role in responding to conservative narratives. Informants noted that messaging applications are frequently used to clarify misunderstandings that arise from online religious content. When participants share messages or videos in group chats, female ulama sometimes respond privately or publicly with explanations that encourage careful consideration and balanced understanding. This method allows for timely educational intervention without escalating tension within the group.

The findings also indicate that female ulama pay close attention to the emotional responses of learners when discussing conservative religious

narratives. Several informants described situations in which participants expressed feelings of anxiety, guilt, or confusion after encountering strict religious messages. In such circumstances, female ulama tend to provide reassurance while encouraging a gradual approach to religious learning and personal reflection. Informant 13 explained that some participants become worried that they may be practicing their religion incorrectly, and therefore, she encourages them to approach religious learning step by step without feeling excessive pressure.

In addition to addressing conservative narratives within educational gatherings, female ulama sometimes engage in one-on-one conversations to discuss sensitive issues. These private discussions allowed participants to express concerns more openly and enabled educators to tailor responses to individual circumstances. Observations suggest that this personalized approach strengthens trust and encourages participants to seek guidance rather than relying solely on external sources. Overall, the findings showed that female ulama in Manado respond to conservative and exclusive religious narratives through educational, relational, and context-sensitive approaches. Their responses prioritize dialogue, clarification, and emotional support over confrontation. By addressing such narratives within trusted learning spaces and everyday interactions, female ulama helped learners navigate diverse religious messages while maintaining social harmony in a multicultural and minority Muslim context.

Discussion

The findings indicate that female ulama in Manado function primarily as community-based Islamic educators whose activities are closely embedded in everyday social life. Their educational roles are carried out through non-formal learning spaces such as *majelis taklim*, *Qur'anic* study circles, family counseling, and community gatherings (Mashuri et al., 2024; Oluwatosin & Rojak, 2023; Otsuki, 2025; Panmei, 2025). This finding is consistent with previous research, which highlights the important role of women in grassroots Islamic education, particularly in community and family contexts where religious knowledge is transmitted through informal and relational learning processes (Azmi et al., 2024; Manahung et al., 2023; Prayitno et al., 2023). Similar studies have shown that female religious educators often become trusted sources of religious guidance because of their close engagement with everyday social issues within the community (Qodriyah & Asfiyah, 2025 and F. S. Rahman et al., 2023).

The emergence of female ulama as community-based educators in Manado can be explained by their accessibility and social proximity to community members, particularly women and families. Their involvement in daily social interactions enables them to build trust and credibility as religious guides. Unlike formal religious authorities whose interactions with learners may be limited to institutional settings, female ulama operate within relational networks that allow continuous engagement with community members. As a result, their educational influence develops organically through sustained

interaction and responsiveness to local social needs. Another important finding of this study is that the educational activities conducted by female ulama emphasize multicultural values such as tolerance, respect, and peaceful coexistence with people from different religious backgrounds. Educational discussions frequently address practical issues faced by Muslim communities living in a Christian-majority environment, including participation in social events, maintaining religious identity, and interacting respectfully with neighbors of different faiths.

This finding aligned with previous studies on multicultural Islamic education, which emphasize that religious learning in plural societies must integrate values of social harmony and civic responsibility (Mashuri et al., 2024; Mutchima, 2025; Oluwatosin & Rojak, 2023; Otsuki, 2025; Panmei, 2025). Research on Islamic education in minority Muslim contexts also suggests that educators often adopt contextual approaches that prioritize relational ethics and coexistence rather than rigid doctrinal boundaries (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Muhaemin et al., 2023; Nasir et al., 2025; Bilgiler, 2023). The practices observed in Manado, therefore, reflect broader trends in Indonesian Islamic education that seek to promote religious moderation within multicultural societies. The emphasis on multicultural values in the educational activities of female ulama can be understood as a response to the social realities of Manado's plural environment. As Muslims live alongside communities of different religious backgrounds, maintaining harmonious social relations becomes a practical necessity (Brehm & Langer, 2025; Mutchima, 2025; Sirichuenvichit & Prarokijjak, 2025).

Consequently, female ulama tend to frame Islamic teachings in ways that encourage respectful interaction, cooperation, and mutual understanding. These contextualized interpretations enable Muslim learners to maintain their religious identity while simultaneously participating constructively in a diverse social environment. The findings also showed that female ulama frequently encounter conservative or exclusive religious narratives circulating through digital media and informal religious networks. In response, they tend to address these narratives through dialogical educational approaches rather than confrontation. Through discussions in religious gatherings, female ulama encourage participants to reflect critically on religious messages and to consider their relevance within the local social context.

This approach is consistent with research on religious moderation in Indonesia, which highlights the role of community-based educators in promoting balanced interpretations of Islamic teachings and countering exclusivist narratives (Lutz et al., 2025; Michael, 2026). Previous studies have shown that grassroots religious educators often play a crucial role in mediating religious knowledge and guiding communities toward moderate interpretations that are compatible with plural social environments. The dialogical approach adopted by female ulama in Manado can be explained by their pedagogical orientation, which prioritizes social harmony and emotional sensitivity within learning environments. By avoiding confrontational responses, female ulama

maintain open and supportive learning spaces where participants feel comfortable discussing religious questions and uncertainties (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Denee, 2024; Fanshurna & Isnadi, 2025).

This strategy was essential because religious material is often sensitive and prone to misinterpretation when detached from the surrounding social reality. By integrating local values into the curriculum, educators can build a cognitive bridge that allows students to see religious teachings and diverse identities as harmoniously intertwined. This occurred through open dialogue that prioritizes empathy, ensuring that dogma was no longer perceived as a rigid constraint but as an ethical guide for public interaction. Consequently, community resistance was minimized because this shift in mindset was achieved through a persuasive approach that respects existing social structures.

This study contributed to the growing body of literature on Islamic education by highlighting the significant role of female ulama as community-based educators in minority Muslim contexts. While previous studies have often focused on formal Islamic institutions or male religious authorities, this research demonstrates that female religious educators play an equally important role in shaping everyday religious learning within communities. Furthermore, the study provided empirical insights into how multicultural Islamic education is practiced in a Christian-majority environment. By examining the educational strategies employed by female ulama in Manado, this research expands existing discussions on Islamic education, gender, and religious moderation. The findings showed that community-based educators can play a strategic role in promoting inclusive and socially responsive interpretations of Islamic teachings within plural societies.

CONCLUSION

This study showed that female ulama in Manado played significant roles in developing multicultural Islamic education within a minority Muslim context. Their educational activities were conducted through community-based learning spaces such as *majelis taklim*, *Qur'anic* study circles, family counseling, and digital religious teaching. Through these educational practices, female ulama promote values of tolerance, respectful interaction, and social harmony in a Christian-majority environment. The findings indicated that Islamic education in multicultural societies is not limited to formal institutions but is often sustained through informal and community-based educational networks. These findings implied that female religious educators play an important role in strengthening socially responsive Islamic education and fostering constructive interreligious relations within diverse communities. The implications of these findings suggested that integrating local values into religious education not only strengthens students' contextual understanding but also serves as a strategic instrument to mitigate social conflict and build a more inclusive social cohesion. This study had several limitations. The research was conducted only in Manado City and involved a limited number of participants, which may not fully represent the experiences of female ulama in other minority Muslim regions.

Future studies could expand the scope by conducting comparative research in different socioreligious contexts or by exploring the role of female ulama in other forms of Islamic educational institutions. Further research may also examine how community-based Islamic education contributes to strengthening religious moderation and multicultural understanding in broader social settings.

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