NAVIGATING MODERN CHALLENGES IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN URBAN MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

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Abstract
This study examines how Islamic schools in urbanized areas of East Kutai, a district in East Kalimantan, Indonesia, navigate pedagogical adaptation, maintain religious authenticity, and address the impact of student diversity. While East Kutai is geographically a district, its urbanized centers, particularly in towns like Sangatta, have seen rapid development, leading to an increasingly diverse student population and a blend of traditional and modern educational approaches. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected survey data from 309 students and conducted interviews with 36 teachers, parents, and students across four Islamic schools in the region. The findings reveal that blended learning models enhance engagement but require contextual adaptation to preserve religious depth. Privately funded schools demonstrate greater adaptability, while government-funded madrasahs face resource limitations. Additionally, cultural diversity enriches classroom discussions but complicates standardized learning. The study highlights the need for hybrid pedagogical strategies integrating digital tools without compromising theological integrity. Policymakers must address funding disparities and support teacher training to ensure inclusive, high-quality IRE. This research contributes to the discourse on religious education by proposing a contextualized digital adaptation model, offering practical recommendations for sustaining Islamic educational identity in urbanized settings.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education; Pedagogical Adaptation; Religious Authenticity; Student Diversity; & Urban Muslim Communities.

A. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has long been a cornerstone in shaping the spiritual, cultural, and moral development of Muslim communities, particularly in preserving Islamic values across generations (Baiza, 2022; Bensaid & Machouche,

2019). In the context of urban Muslim communities, IRE plays a critical role in fostering religious identity while navigating the complex, multicultural, and secularized environments that characterize many urban settings (Assalihee & Boonsuk, 2022). However, the adaptation of IRE in these environments is not without its challenges, as educational institutions strive to balance religious integrity with the demands of modern pedagogy and secular influences (Tuna, 2020). The need to reevaluate traditional pedagogical models within urban settings is pressing, as these models must adapt to new educational demands without compromising religious authenticity (Saada, 2022; Veverka, 2004).

This study is particularly significant because it aims to address the challenges Islamic schools face in adapting modern pedagogies while preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings, a critical issue for urban Muslim communities where multiple cultural identities coexists. The research explored how Islamic schools in urban areas integrate modern educational methods without diluting the core teachings of Islam (Hadi et al., 2024; Othman et al., 2017). This issue is of utmost importance as urbanization, technological advancements, and increased multiculturalism present both opportunities and risks to the transmission of religious knowledge. The increasing reliance on digital tools and hybrid learning models has the potential to enrich students' learning experiences but also raises concerns about the authenticity and depth of religious education (Ismail et al., 2025; Salim, Prasetia, et al., 2024; Zakiyyah et al., 2024). Thus, the importance of this study lies in its potential to propose practical solutions for balancing these tensions within urban Islamic education systems.

While scholars have emphasized the necessity of adapting IRE to urban contexts, existing studies often focus on either the pedagogical innovations or the preservation of religious authenticity, with few offering a comprehensive analysis of the intersection between these two concerns (Harvey, 2023; Yamamah, 2022). Research into hybrid educational models blending traditional Islamic pedagogy with modern methods has been explored by scholars like (Amzat, 2022; Girin, 2024), who advocate for integrating global competencies while maintaining spiritual and cultural values. However, these studies often remain theoretical and do not address the practical challenges encountered by educators, students, and parents in urban settings. Studies on mosque-based programs and digital platforms in urban madrasahs have shown potential for enhancing accessibility (Aneesh et al., 2024; Fuady et al., 2024; Noordin et al., 2017; Zohdi et al., 2024), but little has been done to analyze how these innovations are actually implemented on the ground, particularly in relation to doctrinal authenticity.

The gap in this research aims to explore how urban Islamic schools balance religious authenticity with modern educational demands, providing an empirical examination of the challenges faced by educators, students, and parents. Unlike much of the existing literature, which primarily examines theoretical models or focuses on the challenges faced by either private or public institutions in isolation, this study offers a comparative analysis of these two types of schools and their ability to implement hybrid pedagogies that integrate digital tools without compromising religious teachings.

This research is critical because it tackles a pressing issue in urban Islamic education today: how to balance religious authenticity with modern educational innovations. With the increasing integration of digital tools into the classroom, the educational landscape has changed dramatically, posing both opportunities and challenges for IRE (Ahmad et al., 2025; Kapi Kahbi et al., 2017). Urban Muslim communities, particularly in rapidly developing regions, must adapt to these changes while ensuring that the core values of Islam are not diluted. By examining the practical

integration of digital tools in urban Islamic schools and their impact on religious authenticity, this study offers valuable insights into how IRE can evolve without sacrificing its foundational principles. Additionally, understanding the influence of student diversity in urban schools will provide a more nuanced perspective on how to develop inclusive yet doctrinally consistent educational models.

This study is guided by the following key research questions: 1) How do Islamic schools in urban areas integrate modern educational methods while preserving religious teachings? 2) What challenges do these schools face in maintaining authenticity while competing with public institutions? 3) How does student diversity impact the effectiveness of IRE?. The purpose of this research is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic schools in urban contexts navigate the intersection of tradition and modernity in IRE. By gathering perspectives from educators, parents, and students, the study aims to identify the key challenges and opportunities in adapting IRE pedagogies in urban settings. Furthermore, it seeks to propose practical frameworks that can help Islamic schools integrate digital tools and contemporary teaching methods while safeguarding the integrity of religious education.

The contribution of this research is to contribute the broader discourse on religious education by proposing practical solutions for adapting IRE to the needs of urban Muslim communities. It goes beyond theoretical models to offer an empirical analysis of the lived experiences of educators, students, and parents, addressing the practical difficulties of balancing modern educational methods with religious authenticity. Additionally, it highlights the role of student diversity in shaping educational outcomes, contributing to the growing body of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy in Islamic education. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a roadmap for urban Islamic schools to successfully navigate the demands of modernity while preserving their religious identity.

B. Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014; Minc et al., 2022), integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to analyze Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in urban settings. Data were collected from four Islamic-based schools in Sangatta Utara, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan, Indonesia: SMP Muhammadiyah Sangatta Utara (56 students: 28 males, 28 female), SMP Islam Ma'arif Sangatta Utara (85 students: 46 males, 39 female), SMP Ibnu Sina Sangatta Utara (90 students: 38 males, 52 female), and SMP Islam DDI Sangatta Utara (78 students: 35 males, 43 female).

These four schools were selected for several reasons. First, they represent a diverse range of student backgrounds, including Javanese, Bugis, Kutai, Banjar, Dayak, Madurese, and Lombok communities. This diversity is crucial because it allows the study to capture the impact of cultural variations on IRE, an important aspect in urban Muslim communities. Second, these schools include both privately funded institutions and government-funded madrasahs, allowing for a comparison of how resource availability and institutional type affect the implementation of modern pedagogical strategies while maintaining religious authenticity. Privately funded schools tend to have more flexibility in adopting innovative teaching methods, while government-funded madrasahs often face greater resource limitations. By selecting these schools, the study provides a broad view of the different challenges faced by Islamic schools in adapting to contemporary educational demands while upholding Islamic values. Lastly, the schools were chosen due to their competition with public schools in

Sangatta, which adds another layer of complexity to their educational practices, as these schools must compete with secular educational institutions while retaining their religious focus.

The study collected data from 309 students across these four schools, which was determined based on the research's scope and the available resources. This sample size was chosen to provide a sufficiently diverse set of responses while ensuring that the data collection process remained manageable. The sample of 309 students captures a broad range of student experiences, representing different genders and backgrounds, which is critical for analyzing the impact of cultural diversity on IRE. Additionally, the qualitative component of the study, involving interviews with 36 educators, parents, and religious leaders, complemented the student survey data by providing deeper insights into the challenges faced by these schools.

The study followed a sequential data collection approach (Tashakkori et al., 2015). First, quantitative data were gathered through a structured survey that assessed students' perceptions of pedagogical adaptation, religious authenticity, and the influence of student diversity on IRE. The survey consisted of questions designed to measure how modern educational methods, such as digital tools and blended learning models, were integrated into IRE and whether these methods compromised or enhanced religious teachings. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to summarize the responses and identify trends in the data, such as how students perceive the integration of digital tools in their religious education and how student diversity impacts classroom dynamics. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlations and t-tests, were used to test hypotheses about the relationships between variables, such as the impact of gender or school type on students' perceptions of religious authenticity and pedagogical adaptation (Andy Field, 2017; Watzlawik & Born, 2007).

Following the quantitative data collection, qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews with educators, religious leaders, and parents. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data, allowing for the identification of recurring themes and patterns related to how Islamic schools adapt their teaching methods and maintain religious authenticity. This approach provided a richer understanding of the challenges faced by educators in balancing modern educational techniques with the preservation of religious teachings, as well as the role of student diversity in shaping classroom dynamics and educational outcomes. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the complexities surrounding IRE adaptation in urban communities.

C. Findings and Discussion
1. Findings
Survey and Statistical Analysis

This study employs a survey-based quantitative approach to examine the perceptions of students regarding Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in urban Muslim communities. A structured questionnaire with 25 items was distributed to students across four Islamic schools in Sangatta Utara, East Kutai Regency, East Kalimantan. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale (Alabi & Jelili, 2023). (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) covering three key dimensions:

a. Pedagogical Adaptation – Measuring the integration of digital and modern teaching methods.
b. Religious Authenticity – Assessing students' views on the preservation of Islamic values.

c. Student Diversity Influence – Examining the impact of ethnic diversity on learning outcomes.

Table 1. A total of 309 students participated in the survey, distributed as follows:

School Name	Total Students	Male	Female
SMP Muhammadiyah Sangatta Utara	56	28	28
SMP Islam Ma'arif Sangatta Utara	85	46	39
SMP Ibnu Sina Sangatta Utara	90	38	52
SMP Islam DDI Sangatta Utara	78	35	43
Total	309	147	162
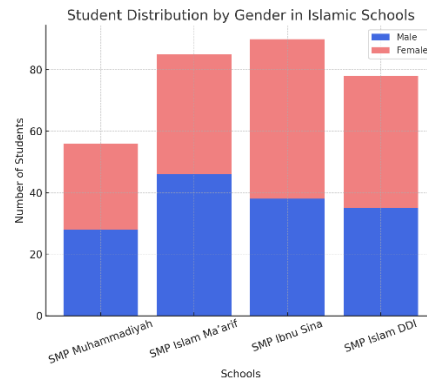
Table 2: The mean scores and standard deviations for each dimension were calculated:

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pedagogical Adaptation	4.21	0.78
Religious Authenticity	4.05	0.82
Student Diversity Influence	3.89	0.91
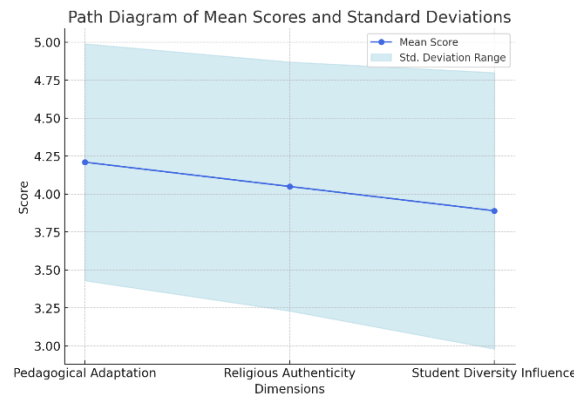
The descriptive statistical analysis (table 2) of pedagogical adaptation, religious authenticity, and student diversity influence provides significant insights into how students perceive Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in urban settings. Pedagogical adaptation recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.21, SD = 0.78), suggesting that there is general consensus among students about the positive effects of blended learning models, which integrate digital tools with traditional instruction. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that responses were consistent across schools, implying that the benefits of modern teaching methods in IRE are widely recognized. However, qualitative findings suggest that while digital learning is embraced, disparities in access and teacher readiness remain concerns, particularly in government-funded schools.

Religious authenticity (table 2) scored a slightly lower mean (M = 4.05, SD = 0.82), reflecting ongoing challenges in maintaining the spiritual depth of IRE while integrating modern pedagogical strategies. The higher variability in responses suggests that perceptions of religious authenticity differ across institutions, likely influenced by school funding and curricular flexibility. Interviews with educators and parents indicate that while private Islamic schools balance religious teachings and digital learning effectively, public madrasahs face structural constraints that hinder their ability to maintain traditional Islamic pedagogy. This finding highlights the need for structured policies that ensure IRE modernization does not compromise its core values.

Student diversity (table 2) influence received the lowest mean score (M = 3.89, SD = 0.91), received the lowest mean score, underscoring the challenges of multicultural classrooms in Islamic education. The high standard deviation indicates that students' experiences with diversity in religious studies are diverse. While diversity enriches classroom discussions, it complicates the standardization of Islamic teachings, as educators face difficulties in harmonizing doctrinal consistency with culturally adaptive teaching strategies. Some parents expressed concerns about the varying religious interpretations and practices among students, while others advocated for a more inclusive approach to education. Table 3: The inferential statistical analysis provides deeper insights into the relationships among these dimensions:

Table 3: The Inferential Statistical Analysis

Statistical Test	Test Statistic	p-value
Independent t-test	-3.163	0.0017
ANOVA	7.615	0.00006
Pearson Correlation	0.919	<0.001

The inferential statistical analysis (Table 3) further reveals significant differences in the perceptions of IRE. The independent t-test (-3.163, p = 0.0017) suggests that gender influences how students engage with IRE adaptations. The ANOVA test (F = 7.615, p = 0.00006) shows significant variations in perceptions across schools, highlighting the role of institutional factors in shaping the effectiveness of IRE. A strong positive Pearson correlation (r = 0.919, p < 0.001) between pedagogical adaptation and student engagement underscores the importance of modernizing Islamic education while ensuring theological integrity. These findings reinforce the importance of hybrid learning models that balance innovation with tradition and address access disparities in religious education. The study identified several key findings regarding the state of IRE in urban Islamic schools:

a. Pedagogical Adaptation: Schools increasingly adopt blended learning models, integrating digital tools with traditional face-to-face instruction. Teachers emphasize contextualizing Islamic teachings to resonate with students' urban experiences.

b. Challenges in Maintaining Religious Authenticity: Parents express concerns about preserving religious authenticity amid modern educational influences. Resource disparities exist, with privately funded institutions demonstrating greater adaptability compared to government-funded madrasahs.

c. Influence of Student Diversity: The multicultural background of students enriches classroom discussions but also poses challenges in creating standardized learning approaches. Teachers must employ flexible methodologies to accommodate different cultural perspectives within Islamic teachings.

Pedagogical Adaptation in Urban Muslim Schools

A qualitative interview study was conducted with six Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, 15 parents, and 15 students from four Islamic schools in Sangatta Utara, East Kutai Regency. The purpose was to explore their perspectives on pedagogical adaptation in Islamic Religious Education, particularly regarding the integration of digital tools and contextualized teaching.

Table 4. Interview Participants

Participant Group	Number of Respondents
PAI Teachers	6
Parents	15
Students	15
Total	**36**

Table 5. Key Themes and Responses

Theme	Teachers' Perspectives (n=6)	Parents' Perspectives (n=15)	Students' Perspectives (n=15)
Integration of Digital Tools	All teachers use digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom. However, they struggle with digital literacy and limited access to proper training.	Parents generally support digital integration but worry about excessive screen time. Some lack familiarity with digital tools.	Students enjoy learning through videos and interactive quizzes but prefer a balance with in-person discussions.
Blended Learning Challenges	Schools lack infrastructure, and some teachers feel unprepared to implement blended learning effectively.	Some parents struggle to support their children with digital assignments due to lack of technological skills.	Many students experience connectivity issues, making online learning inconsistent.
Contextualization of Islamic Teachings	Teachers attempt to relate Islamic teachings to urban	Parents appreciate contextualization but express concerns	Students prefer examples that relate to their

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	issues such as social media ethics and career planning.	about maintaining traditional values.	daily lives but still value classical religious narratives.
Effectiveness of the Adaptation	Teachers observe increased student engagement but note disparities in students' digital literacy.	Parents report mixed responses, with some children highly engaged and others struggling to adapt.	Students generally find digital integration helpful but prefer a structured and guided approach.
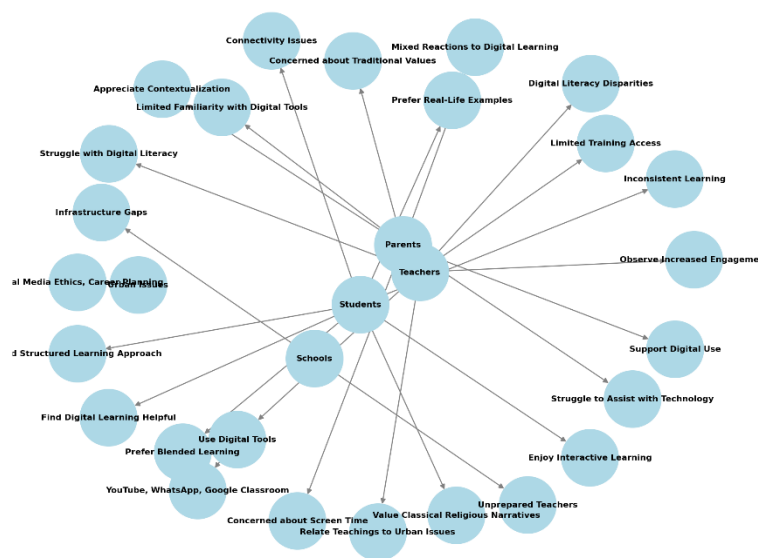
Summary of Findings from table 5 above: First, Positive Aspects: Digital tools enhance engagement, and contextualizing religious teachings makes them more relevant to students. Second, Challenges: Limited teacher training, infrastructure gaps, and concerns about screen time and maintaining traditional values. Third, Recommendations: Schools should provide teacher training, parental digital literacy workshops, and hybrid models that combine online and face-to-face learning for better effectiveness.

Challenges in Maintaining Religious Authenticity in Urban Muslim Schools

A qualitative interview study to understand concerns and challenges in preserving religious authenticity amidst modern educational influences, can be seen in the following table 6:

Table 6. Key Themes and Responses

Theme	Teachers' Perspectives (n=6)	Parents' Perspectives (n=15)	Students' Perspectives (n=15)
Concerns Over Religious	Teachers acknowledge tension between modernizing education	Parents worry that increased exposure to secular subjects and	Some students find religious lessons less

Authenticity	and preserving traditional Islamic values. Some feel pressured to align with government curricula that emphasize general subjects over religious content.	digital learning might dilute religious teachings. They prefer stronger Islamic reinforcement at school.	engaging than general subjects but appreciate when teachers connect Islamic teachings with real-life contexts.
Resource Disparities	Privately funded schools have better resources to implement Islamic-integrated modern education, while government-funded madrasahs struggle with outdated materials and limited infrastructure.	Parents from private school backgrounds feel more satisfied with the balance of modern education and religious preservation. Parents from government-funded schools report concerns over a weaker Islamic foundation.	Students in private institutions report more engaging Islamic studies, while those in madrasahs feel their curriculum lacks innovation.
Influence of Digital Media	Some teachers integrate Islamic perspectives into discussions about social media and global issues, but others lack digital literacy.	Parents express mixed feelings: digital tools help in education but also expose children to secular influences.	Students use digital platforms to explore religious content but also face distractions from secular media.
Solutions and Adaptation	Teachers suggest stronger policy support and curriculum adjustments to ensure religious authenticity remains intact while adapting to modern pedagogical trends.	Parents advocate for increased religious content in school curriculums and better parental involvement in religious education.	Students prefer a hybrid approach where religious studies remain engaging and applicable to their lives.
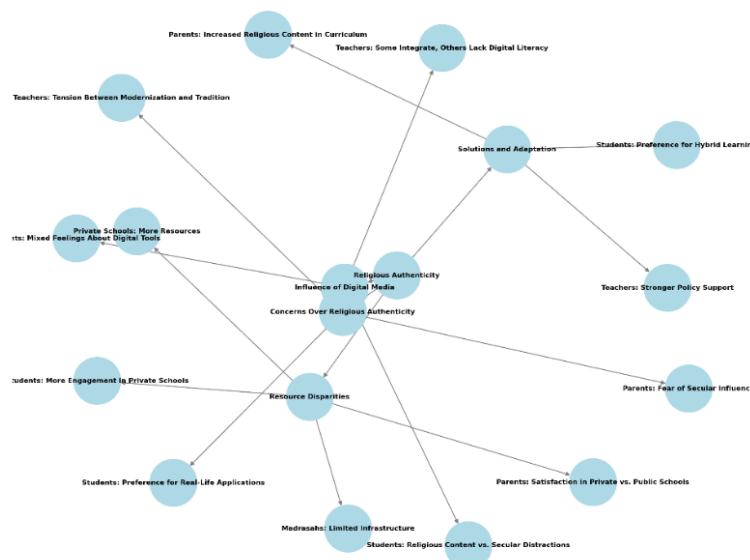
Based on table 6 above, two main findings can be interpreted as follows:

a. Balancing Modern Education and Religious Values. The tension between modernizing education and maintaining religious authenticity is evident among all stakeholders. Privately funded institutions show more flexibility in incorporating religious teachings effectively, whereas government-funded madrasahs face challenges due to limited resources; Parents' concerns highlight the need for Islamic schools to reinforce religious teachings without compromising students' preparedness for contemporary challenges.

b. Policy and Infrastructure Needs. Government-funded schools require better support in integrating religious authenticity into their modern curriculum. Enhancing teacher training and updating religious education materials can help bridge this gap; Digital literacy among teachers and parents plays a crucial role in maintaining religious authenticity while embracing technology. Schools should provide structured programs to guide students in responsibly navigating digital religious content.

Overall, while digital tools and blended learning offer opportunities, there is a pressing need for schools to find a sustainable balance between modern education and religious authenticity to ensure that Islamic teachings remain relevant and influential in students' lives.

Influence of Student Diversity on Islamic Religious Education

The study aimed to understand the impact of student diversity on Islamic education and how teachers adapt their methodologies to accommodate different cultural perspectives.

Table 7. Key Themes and Responses

Theme	Teachers' Perspectives (n=6)	Parents' Perspectives (n=15)	Students' Perspectives (n=15)
Cultural Diversity in the Classroom	Teachers observe that having students from different ethnic backgrounds (Jawa, Bugis, Kutai, Banjar, Dayak, Madura, Lombok) enriches discussions and provides various perspectives on Islamic teachings. However, it also creates differences in religious practices and interpretations.	Parents appreciate the exposure to different cultures but worry about inconsistent religious understandings among students. Some prefer a more uniform approach to religious teachings.	Students enjoy learning from peers of different backgrounds but sometimes struggle with varying religious perspectives, especially on ritual practices and interpretations.
Challenges in Standardizing Learning	Teachers find it challenging to develop a one-size-fits-all teaching model. They must adapt materials and examples to make religious teachings	Parents from different cultural backgrounds have different expectations regarding religious education, which	Some students feel that discussions on Islamic teachings should be more inclusive, while others prefer a traditional

	relevant to all students.	can lead to conflicts over teaching approaches.	approach.
Adaptation Strategies	Teachers employ contextual teaching methods, linking religious lessons to students' everyday lives. They also encourage critical thinking and respectful dialogue.	Parents support the idea of flexible teaching but emphasize maintaining the core principles of Islam.	Students appreciate interactive learning approaches, such as discussions and storytelling, to understand different perspectives better.
Impact on Student Religious Understanding	Teachers believe diversity fosters deeper religious comprehension, as students learn to appreciate multiple interpretations within Islam.	Parents acknowledge that diversity strengthens social tolerance but express concerns about the consistency of religious adherence.	Students report gaining broader insights into Islam but sometimes feel uncertain about which interpretation to follow.

Based on table 7 above, two main findings can be interpreted as follows:

a. Enrichment vs. Standardization Challenge. The multicultural composition of students enhances religious education by providing varied insights into Islamic teachings. However, it also challenges teachers to balance inclusivity with a standardized learning approach that maintains the core Islamic values; Teachers play a crucial role in ensuring that diverse perspectives are acknowledged while maintaining a coherent and structured religious curriculum.

b. Flexibility and Inclusive Teaching. To address these challenges, teachers adopt flexible methodologies, incorporating discussion-based learning and contextualization strategies to accommodate different cultural perspectives; While parents appreciate the multicultural environment, they emphasize the

need for schools to maintain a strong foundation in core Islamic principles to prevent dilution of religious teachings.

Student diversity in urban Islamic schools serves as both an asset and a challenge. Schools must implement adaptive teaching strategies that respect cultural differences while upholding a unified Islamic educational framework.

2. Discussion

Pedagogical Adaptation to Balance Traditional Islamic Teachings with Contemporary Educational Methods

The adaptation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in urban Muslim communities presents both opportunities and challenges as institutions strive to integrate modern pedagogical tools while preserving the authenticity of Islamic teachings (Ali, 2022; Arim et al., 2024; Darwanto et al., 2024). The findings from this study indicate that digital tools and blended learning models have significantly enhanced student engagement, with a mean score of 4.21 (SD = 0.78) for pedagogical adaptation (table 2). However, qualitative findings reveal that educators and parents remain concerned about the balance between modernization and maintaining religious depth (table 5). This aligns with previous research emphasizing the role of technology in improving accessibility in religious education while also raising concerns about its potential impact on the spiritual transmission of knowledge (Abdullah et al., 2019). Highlight that the introduction of digital learning tools into Islamic education offers an opportunity for greater access but simultaneously risks weakening students' connection to the authentic, spiritual essence of religious teachings. Similarly (Rahman, 2022), warns that while digital tools can enhance engagement, they might detract from the depth of Islamic values if not integrated thoughtfully into the curriculum.

The use of digital platforms such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom has facilitated engagement but also highlighted disparities in access and teacher preparedness. In line with the studies of (Miskiah et al., 2019; Rahman, 2022), which suggest that digital integration in religious education requires structured implementation. These studies emphasize the need for schools to invest in teacher training and institutional support to ensure that digital tools complement rather than replace traditional forms of religious education. In this study, while most students reported positive experiences with digital learning, interviews with educators revealed that the lack of digital literacy and infrastructure in certain schools hinders its full effectiveness. This observation is consistent with findings by (Darwanto et al., 2024; Taufikin et al., 2024), who argue that the success of technology integration is not solely dependent on access to digital tools but also on the preparedness of educators to utilize these tools effectively in religious settings. This suggests the need for hybrid models that retain traditional face-to-face instruction while leveraging digital tools to enhance engagement without compromising religious authenticity.

Table 8 below compares previous research with the current study's findings, illustrating key areas of convergence and novelty:

Aspect	Previous Studies	Current Study Findings	Novelty
Digital Integration	Enhances accessibility but reduces teacher-student interaction (Rahman, 2022)	Digital tools improve engagement but require careful contextualization	Need for structured teacher training and balanced hybrid models

Blended Learning Challenges	Infrastructure gaps limit implementation (Salim, Prasetia, et al., 2024)	Government-funded schools struggle with resources and teacher preparedness	Policy interventions are needed for equitable technology access
Contextualization of Teachings	Important for student relevance (Abdullah et al., 2019)	Teachers connect Islamic teachings to urban issues like social media ethics	Developing culturally adaptive Islamic curricula
Parental Perspectives	Parents prefer traditional learning (Abubakar et al., 2023)	Parents support digital learning but worry about religious authenticity	Encouraging parental involvement in shaping pedagogical strategies
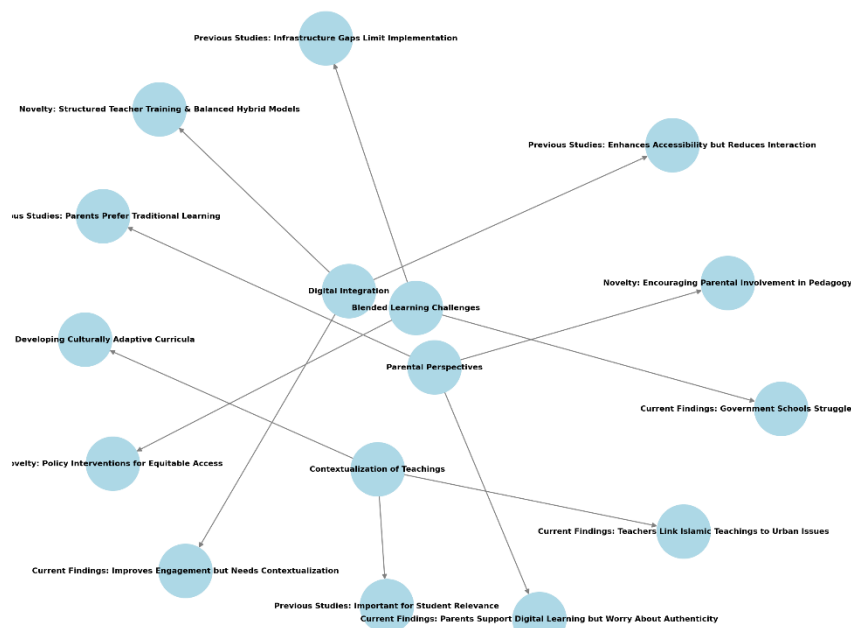
One key insight from this study is the necessity of *contextualized digital adaptation*, ensuring that technology supports rather than replaces traditional Islamic pedagogy. Unlike previous studies that focus solely on the benefits of digital integration (Vetrivel & Mohanasundaram, 2024; Zakiyyah et al., 2024), this research highlights the importance of maintaining religious engagement through interactive, culturally relevant teaching methods. For instance, educators in this study reported using real-world applications of Islamic teachings, such as ethical considerations in social media usage, to make religious lessons more relevant to urban students. This finding echoes the work of (Mariyono, 2024; Sumanti et al., 2024), who argue that contextualization is crucial for preserving the essence of Islamic education while adapting to modern needs. As Mariyono and Sumanti highlight, integrating technology into the curriculum should be done in a way that resonates with the lived experiences of students, thus ensuring that technology complements rather than dilutes religious teachings.

Another significant finding is the impact of school funding on the effectiveness of pedagogical adaptation. Privately funded institutions demonstrate greater success in implementing blended learning due to better resources and administrative flexibility, whereas government-funded madrasahs face infrastructure challenges. This finding

aligns with prior research indicating that disparities in funding influence the ability of schools to modernize religious education effectively (Hakim, 2019; Patria, 2023; Riinawati et al., 2024). The implication here is that policymakers must address these disparities through funding initiatives and teacher training programs to ensure that all Islamic schools, regardless of financial status, can integrate effective pedagogical adaptations.

Furthermore, the role of student diversity must be considered when implementing digital learning models in IRE. While multicultural classrooms enrich discussions, they also present challenges in standardizing Islamic teachings across different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. This study's findings suggest that while most of students appreciate diverse perspectives, teachers struggle to create a curriculum that respects cultural variations while maintaining doctrinal consistency. This supports prior research by (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024; Foley et al., 2024; Hoque, 2024; Orchard, 2015), which emphasizes the need for culturally responsive pedagogy in religious education. However, this research goes further by highlighting that balancing inclusivity with doctrinal consistency requires a hybrid approach that combines flexibility with a unified Islamic educational framework. This is also supported by the work of (Rahman, 2022), who argues that while diversity can enrich the learning experience, it requires careful pedagogical strategies to avoid fragmentation of religious principles.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of *hybrid learning strategies that balance digital innovation with the preservation of Islamic epistemology*. Schools must adopt structured teacher training programs, provide equitable access to digital resources, and involve parents in curriculum development to ensure that pedagogical adaptation enhances rather than diminishes religious authenticity. Future research should examine the long-term effects of digital learning in IRE, exploring its impact on students' spiritual and intellectual development over time. By addressing these critical areas, Islamic education can successfully navigate the demands of modernity while remaining true to its foundational values.

## Challenges in Maintaining Religious Authenticity while Competing with Public Schools

The challenge of maintaining religious authenticity in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) within urban Muslim communities continues to be a pressing concern as modern educational influences reshape pedagogical approaches (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024). The increasing reliance on digital tools, evolving curricula, and the push for global competencies introduce both opportunities and risks to the preservation of Islamic teachings (Abdulrahman, 2024). This study's findings suggest that students, educators, and parents remain divided on the extent to which modernization should be incorporated into IRE. The mean score of 4.05 (SD = 0.82) for religious authenticity reflects these concerns, demonstrating that while students generally acknowledge the relevance of modern education, they also recognize the potential dilution of core religious values if not carefully managed. This finding aligns with prior studies, such as those by (Salim, Suyuti, et al., 2024; Zulfatmi, 2023), which emphasize the need for a careful balance between educational modernization and the preservation of religious integrity, highlighting the tension that exists when schools strive to incorporate both secular and religious learning in their curricula.

The integration of secular subjects into Islamic curricula presents a particular challenge, as schools seek to balance doctrinal depth with contemporary academic demands (Arim et al., 2024; Franken & Gent, 2021; Mohammed et al., 2021; Sidik et al.,

2024; Tuna, 2020). This study's qualitative (Table 6) findings reveal that educators, particularly those in government-funded madrasahs, feel pressure to align with national education standards, sometimes at the expense of traditional Islamic teachings. This aligns with prior research by (Bin Jamil et al., 2024), who argue that standardization efforts often undermine the theological depth of IRE. Similarly, research by (Mohammed et al., 2021; Salim, Suyuti, et al., 2024) highlighted that the integration of secular subjects into Islamic curricula can create a tension between global competencies and Islamic values, with educators often forced to prioritize one over the other in response to external academic pressures. This is particularly true in government-funded schools, which often feel compelled to conform to national education standards that prioritize secular subjects, thereby weakening the focus on religious teachings. In contrast, privately funded institutions demonstrate greater flexibility in implementing curricula that maintain a strong religious foundation while incorporating digital and interactive methodologies. This aligns with research by (Mariyono, 2024; Sumanti et al., 2024), who argue that private schools tend to have more autonomy in integrating modern learning methods while maintaining their religious identity, offering a more holistic approach to education that balances both religious and secular learning.

Table 9 below presents a comparative analysis of previous studies and the current study's findings, illustrating key consistencies and novel contributions:

Aspect	Previous Studies	Current Study Findings	Novelty
Digital Integration	Enhances accessibility but may weaken traditional learning methods (Zakiyyah et al., 2024)	Some teachers successfully integrate digital tools while maintaining religious depth	Need for structured teacher training to balance technology and religious pedagogy
Institutional Differences	Private institutions adapt more effectively (Sumanti et al., 2024; Thoyib et al., 2024)	Privately funded schools show stronger integration of modern methods than government-funded madrasahs	Policy recommendations for reducing disparities between private and public Islamic schools
Parental Concerns	Parents fear dilution of religious teachings (Abubakar et al., 2023)	Parents support digital learning but emphasize the need for stronger religious content	Increased parental involvement in shaping Islamic curricula
Student Engagement	Mixed reactions to modernized religious education (Fakhri et al., 2023)	Some students find digital integration engaging, while others struggle with religious depth	Development of hybrid learning models tailored to urban Islamic schools
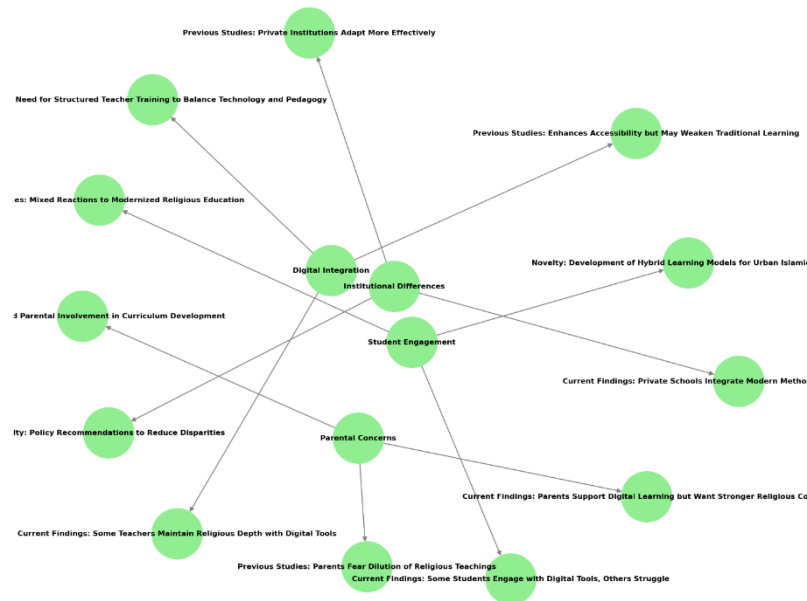
One of the key findings of this study is the need for *policy reforms that ensure religious authenticity remains a priority amid educational modernization*. While previous studies have acknowledged the risk of secular influences in IRE (Sahin, 2018), this research highlights the structural disparities between institutions that contribute to these challenges. The interviews reveal that government-funded schools face significant limitations in implementing pedagogical reforms due to regulatory constraints and resource deficiencies. In contrast, private institutions demonstrate a more flexible and holistic approach to religious education, emphasizing a seamless integration of modern learning tools without compromising theological depth (Amzat, 2022). This observation aligns with the work of (Dudin et al., 2019; Filipović, 2019), who argue that school funding plays a critical role in shaping the ability of institutions to successfully integrate both modern pedagogical techniques and religious education, suggesting that funding disparities should be addressed to ensure equitable access to high-quality education for all students.

The role of digital literacy also emerged as a crucial factor in preserving religious authenticity in IRE. The inferential statistical analysis (t-test: -3.163, p = 0.0017) suggests that perceptions of religious authenticity vary significantly between male and female students, indicating potential gender-based differences in how Islamic education is received. Meanwhile, the ANOVA test (F = 7.615, p = 0.00006) underscores the impact of institutional differences on students' experiences, reaffirming that school funding and pedagogical approaches play a significant role in shaping perceptions of religious authenticity. This is consistent with findings from (Jarvis, 2021; McMorris & Glass, 2018; Robinson & Cush, 2018), who found that the gender-based differences in religious engagement are often influenced by pedagogical approaches, suggesting that teachers may need to tailor their methods to address gender-specific learning needs. The strong Pearson correlation (r = 0.919, p < 0.001) between pedagogical adaptation and religious engagement further highlights the importance of aligning modern educational methods with traditional Islamic values to sustain student interest and doctrinal integrity. This reinforces the findings of (Darwanto et al., 2024), who argues that successful pedagogical adaptation in Islamic education is one that aligns technological advancements with the underlying spiritual and moral teachings of

Islam. The study also reveals that *parental involvement plays a critical role in maintaining religious authenticity in urban Islamic schools*. Many parents advocate for a structured approach that ensures digital learning enhances rather than replaces classical Islamic pedagogy. This perspective supports research by (Diana et al., 2021), who found that family engagement in religious education significantly strengthens students' commitment to Islamic teachings. The findings suggest that schools should create avenues for parental participation in curriculum development, reinforcing the alignment between home-based religious education and formal classroom instruction. This aligns with the work of (Abubakar et al., 2023), who highlights the importance of involving parents in shaping educational strategies to ensure a cohesive approach to Islamic education across both formal and informal settings.

Ultimately, this study underscores *the importance of a hybrid approach to IRE that integrates digital advancements while safeguarding religious authenticity*. Schools must implement structured teacher training programs to enhance digital literacy within an Islamic pedagogical framework. Additionally, policymakers should address funding disparities to ensure that both private and government-funded institutions have the resources to preserve religious depth in IRE (Berglund, 2019; Saparudin & Emawati, 2023). Future research should explore the long-term impact of digital integration on religious identity formation, assessing whether blended learning models sustain theological engagement over time. By addressing these challenges, urban Islamic education can remain relevant in contemporary settings while staying firmly rooted in Islamic traditions.

**Influence of Student Diversity of IRE in Urban Muslim Communities**

The role of student diversity in Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is increasingly significant in urban Muslim communities, where multicultural classrooms present both opportunities and challenges (Hanif et al., 2024). The findings from this study indicate that diversity fosters rich discussions and broader perspectives on Islamic teachings, yet it also complicates the standardization of curricula. With a mean score of 3.89 (SD = 0.91) for student diversity influence, the variability in responses suggests that students experience religious education differently depending on their cultural backgrounds and school environments. While diversity enhances engagement, it also requires educators to adopt flexible methodologies that respect multiple interpretations of Islamic teachings while maintaining doctrinal consistency (Rahman, 2022). This aligns with earlier findings by (Muhajir et al., 2020), who emphasize that multiculturalism in religious classrooms necessitates adaptable teaching approaches that ensure inclusivity while retaining core religious principles. However, they also caution that excessive variation in interpretations may challenge the unity of religious teachings across diverse groups.

This study's qualitative findings (table 7) highlight the nuanced challenges of balancing inclusivity with structured religious education. Teachers acknowledge that multicultural classrooms provide valuable insights into comparative religious interpretations, yet they also struggle with developing a curriculum that accommodates diverse perspectives without diluting core Islamic values. Parents express divided opinions; while some support an inclusive approach that integrates various cultural perspectives, others prefer a standardized model to ensure uniformity in religious understanding. This reflects broader debates in Islamic education, where scholars such as (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024; Hoque, 2024) argued for the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in religious instruction, stressing that students' diverse cultural backgrounds can enrich religious discussions. However, they also note

the risks of fragmenting religious values when overly inclusive approaches are adopted, suggesting a careful balance between diversity and religious coherence.

Table 10 below presents a comparative analysis of previous research and the current study's findings, identifying both consistencies and novel insights:

Aspect	Previous Studies	Current Study Findings	Novelty
Multicultural Exposure	Enhances student engagement in religious education (Afriyanto & Anandari, 2024; Hoque, 2024))	Students report enriched discussions but struggle with varying interpretations	Need for adaptive teaching models that balance inclusivity and doctrinal integrity
Standardization vs. Flexibility	Challenges in unifying diverse Islamic traditions (Hanif et al., 2024)	Teachers struggle to balance cultural inclusivity with religious coherence	Development of structured yet flexible curricula to address diverse student needs
Parental Concerns	Parents prefer a more standardized approach (Abubakar et al., 2023)	Parents worry about inconsistencies in religious understanding	Policy recommendations to involve parents in shaping culturally responsive curricula
Teaching Adaptation	Requires flexibility to integrate different cultural expressions of Islam (Subhan, 2023)	Teachers use discussion-based methods but report challenges in doctrinal consistency	Hybrid models incorporating traditional and modern teaching strategies
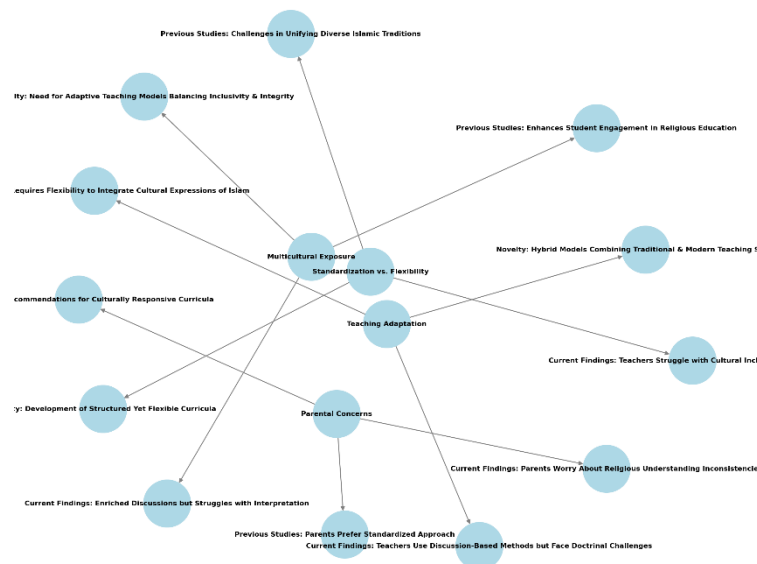
One of the critical implications of this study is the need for *structured yet adaptive religious curricula* that accommodate diverse student backgrounds while ensuring a unified Islamic framework. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on either the benefits or the challenges of multicultural religious education (Afriyanto & Anandari,

2024; Hoque, 2024), this study highlights the necessity of balancing inclusivity with standardization. Findings indicate that while most of educators believe that diversity strengthens students' understanding of Islam, they also note inconsistencies in how students interpret religious teachings. These concerns align with the work of (Asghar et al., 2024), who emphasize that inclusivity in religious education should be paired with a structured, unified approach to prevent fragmentation in religious interpretation. This underscores the need for carefully designed lesson plans that integrate contextual learning while reinforcing fundamental Islamic principles, a notion supported by (Subhan, 2023), who argues that maintaining doctrinal integrity is paramount, even as educators acknowledge cultural variations.

Additionally, the inferential statistical analysis (t-test: -3.163, p = 0.0017) reveals significant differences in perceptions between male and female students regarding IRE adaptation. The ANOVA test (F = 7.615, p = 0.00006) further confirms that institutional differences play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences, reaffirming that school funding and pedagogical approaches play a significant role in shaping perceptions of religious authenticity. These findings are consistent with the work of (Ahmed, 2021), who found gender-based variations in engagement with IRE, suggesting that gender-sensitive pedagogies might be necessary to address these differences effectively. The strong Pearson correlation (r = 0.919, p < 0.001) between pedagogical adaptation and student engagement further highlights the importance of aligning modern educational methods with traditional Islamic values to sustain student interest and doctrinal integrity. This finding corroborates the study by (Hossain et al., 2024), who emphasize the need for pedagogical flexibility to ensure that students remain engaged without compromising their religious education.

The study also reveals that parental involvement plays a critical role in maintaining religious authenticity in urban Islamic schools. Many parents advocate for a structured approach that ensures digital learning enhances rather than replaces classical Islamic pedagogy. This perspective supports research by (Diana et al., 2021), who found that family engagement in religious education significantly strengthens students' commitment to Islamic teachings. The findings suggest that schools should create avenues for parental participation in curriculum development, reinforcing the alignment between home-based religious education and formal classroom instruction. This resonates with the findings of (Abubakar et al., 2023), who stress that active parental involvement can bridge the gap between modern pedagogical methods and traditional Islamic values.

Ultimately, this study highlights the dual nature of student diversity in urban Islamic schools—both as an asset and a challenge. While diverse perspectives enrich classroom discussions, they also necessitate *pedagogical frameworks that strike a balance between doctrinal consistency and cultural inclusivity*. Schools must adopt structured policies that support teacher development, integrate culturally responsive teaching methodologies, and engage parents in shaping religious curricula. As argued by Rahman (2022) and Ahmed (2020), the future of Islamic education lies in developing hybrid learning models that embrace diversity while preserving the integrity of Islamic teachings. Future research should explore the long-term effects of student diversity on religious identity formation, assessing how exposure to multiple interpretations influences students' understanding and practice of Islam over time. By addressing these complexities, IRE can continue to evolve in urban settings while preserving its foundational principles.

D.   Conclusion

This study provides critical insights into the adaptation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in urban Muslim communities, focusing on the integration of digital tools, the preservation of religious authenticity, and the influence of student diversity. The findings suggest that blended learning models, which combine digital tools with traditional teaching methods, offer significant benefits in student engagement. However, these models require careful contextualization to ensure that religious depth is not compromised. Additionally, while privately funded Islamic schools are better equipped to adapt to modern educational advancements, government-funded madrasahs face resource limitations that hinder their ability to implement these changes effectively. Furthermore, the diverse cultural backgrounds of students enrich classroom discussions but present challenges in standardizing Islamic teachings across varying cultural perspectives. These insights underline the importance of developing hybrid pedagogical approaches that respect religious traditions while embracing modern educational practices.

The key findings highlight several important implications for educators, policymakers, and religious scholars. First, the integration of digital tools into IRE must be accompanied by structured teacher training programs that focus on both technological literacy and theological integrity. Government support is crucial to bridging the resource gap between private and public Islamic institutions, ensuring that all students have equitable access to quality religious education. Moreover, curriculum development should consider the diverse backgrounds of students, promoting inclusivity while safeguarding doctrinal authenticity. These measures call for a comprehensive policy framework that supports religious education in urban settings without compromising core Islamic values. In addition, the involvement of parents in educational decision-making is essential, as their participation helps ensure that religious authenticity is maintained amid pedagogical transformations.

This research contributes to the broader academic discourse on Islamic education by presenting empirical evidence on how urban Muslim communities navigate the intersection of tradition and modernity in IRE. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on either pedagogical innovation or religious preservation, this study synthesizes both aspects, offering a comprehensive analysis of their intersection. The findings underscore the need to develop contextualized digital adaptation models that ensure modern educational tools complement rather than replace traditional Islamic learning methods.

Suggestions for future research include exploring the longitudinal effects of digital integration in Islamic education, particularly its impact on students' religious identity and intellectual development over time. Further investigations into the effectiveness of policy implementation in bridging the resource gaps between private and public institutions would provide valuable insights. Additionally, research examining the long-term outcomes of hybrid learning models could shed light on how they influence students' understanding of Islam and their ability to navigate both religious and secular worlds. By addressing these gaps, scholars and practitioners can continue to refine strategies that sustain Islamic religious identity while adapting to contemporary educational demands.

E.   Acknowledgements

F.   Author Contributions Statement

Taufikin initiated the research idea, designed the research flow, prepared the materials and instruments needed to collect data, analyzed the data, completed the article. Sri Nurhayati helped in analyzing data, correcting, managing references. Ahmad Muzakki contributed in analyzing data, correcting, editing. Moses Adeleke Adeoye played the role of analyzing data, correcting, managing references, completing.

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