

Between National Universalism and Islamic Particularism: A Discrepancy in Policy Coherence in the Implementation of the Aceh Education Qanun

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Abstract

Educational decentralization often aligns national and subnational regulations without changing classroom practice. In Aceh, special autonomy requires schools to deliver education "in an Islamic and integrated manner" under the Aceh Education Qanun (No. 11/2014), alongside Indonesia's National Education System Law (No. 20/2003). Research has stopped at the regulatory level, leaving implementation and its consequences for religious-minority students largely unexamined. This study examined how public senior high schools (SMAN) in Subulussalam City implemented the integration mandate, the roles of school leaders, teachers, and the Regional Education Council (MPD), and what helped or hindered it. Using a qualitative, descriptive-analytical single instrumental case study with embedded units, we interviewed 13 participants at three levels (policy, school, and direct experience), analyzing interviews and documents with the Miles–Huberman interactive model and thematic coding. The two frameworks cohered on paper but not in the general curriculum, where integration remained visible routine rather than curricular redesign. Without technical guidance, schools handled non-Muslim students inconsistently: provision depended on the school attended rather than on a guaranteed right, contrary to the Qanun's own principles of justice and non-discrimination. Officials read the absence of complaints as satisfaction, yet reporting channels were weak and little known, a condition the council itself partly acknowledged. Theoretically, the case specifies when street-level discretion becomes distributive inequality: when needs are identical across schools but technical guidance is absent. Closing the gap requires technical guidelines, not further political commitment. As the minority evidence rests on few informants at one site, the findings are illustrative, not generalizable.

Keywords: education policy coherence; street-level bureaucracy; Aceh Education Qanun; religious-minority educational rights.

Introduction

Decentralization reforms across the Global South have shifted a substantial share of educational authority to subnational governments, creating space for schooling that reflects local values and identities. The same shift creates a governance problem that is easy to name but hard to solve: what happens when a national mandate and a subnational mandate must both operate in the same classroom, with no mechanism to reconcile them? This is a question of policy coherence. Cejudo and Michel distinguish internal coherence (objectives that align on paper) from implementation coherence, whether those aligned objectives actually shape consistent action on the ground.¹ Regulatory convergence does not guarantee operational integration; the gap between the two determines the substance of decentralized education policy.

Indonesia offers a demanding test case. Since the post-1998 reforms, it has run one of the world's most extensive educational decentralization programs, shifting authority to the regency and city levels. This shift exposed the system to uneven institutional capacity, divergent local interpretations, and recurring gaps between national frameworks and local practice.² Curriculum and local-content policy have repeatedly become an arena where national standardization and local specificity compete rather than align.³ Several studies document recurring misalignment between national reforms and subnational implementation.⁴

Aceh is the most institutionally distinctive case. Under Law No. 11 of 2006 on the Government of Aceh, the province may administer education in accordance with Islamic

¹ G M Cejudo and C L Michel, "Addressing Fragmented Government Action: Coordination, Coherence, and Integration," *Policy Sciences* 50, no. 4 (2017): 745–67, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-017-9281-5>.

² C Bjork, "Decentralization in Education, Institutional Culture, and Teacher Autonomy in Indonesia," *International Review of Education* 50, no. 3–4 (2004): 245–62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-004-2622-6>; S Kristiansen and Pratikno, "Decentralising Education in Indonesia," *International Journal of Educational Development* 26, no. 5 (2006): 513–31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2005.12.003>; A Rosser and P Sulistiyanto, "The Politics of Universal Free Basic Education in Decentralized Indonesia: Insights from Yogyakarta," *Pacific Affairs* 86, no. 3 (2013): 539–60, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2013863539>.

³ A U Dewi, "Curriculum Reform in the Decentralization of Education in Indonesia: Effect on Students' Achievements," *Cakrawala Pendidikan* 40, no. 1 (2021): 158–69, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v40i1.33821>; N I Sagita, N A Deliarnoor, and D Afifah, "Local Content Curriculum Implementation in the Framework of Nationalism and National Security," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 13, no. 4 (2019): 91–103.

⁴ H M Fazlurrahman, "Policy Disharmony in Indonesia (Dialectics of National Education Reform)," *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews* 7, no. 3 (2019): 331–37, <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.7349>; M Muhdi, "Framework for Implementation of Education Policy in the Perspective of Education Management in Indonesia," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 7, no. 12 (2019): 2717–28, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2019.071220>.

values, as set out in Qanun No. 11 of 2014, which mandates education to be conducted "in an Islamic and integrated manner." These provisions also shape budgeting, governance, and Sharia enforcement across the province.⁵ Wider efforts to institutionalize Sharia-based public policy have generated political and administrative debate.⁶ Post-conflict and post-disaster trajectories further complicated education in Aceh, reshaping both the capacity and legitimacy of local institutions.⁷

At the regulatory level, the two mandates align closely. The National Education System Law (Law No. 20/2003, hereafter *Sisdiknas*) defines the purpose of education as producing faithful, God-fearing learners of noble character and responsible citizenship; the Qanun pursues the same ends of character through an explicitly Islamic framework. In Cejudo and Michel's terms, internal coherence is mostly present.⁸ The actors themselves notice one narrowing clause: *Sisdiknas*'s faith in the One Almighty God becomes, in the Qanun, faith in Allah SWT, a universalist-to-particularist shift that recurs in participants' accounts.

Whether that alignment survives in the classroom is a separate question. Comparative studies of cross-sectoral implementation show that coherence achieved at the design stage often dissolves in implementation, leaving a structural gap between commitment and practice.⁹ Street-level bureaucracy theory explains why. Lipsky argues

⁵ Ayumiati et al., "Budget Management of the Aceh Government: An Analysis of the Maqāṣid Al-Sharī'ah Approach," *Samarah* 8, no. 1 (2024): 538–55, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v8i1.19886>; Z A Safrizal et al., "The Implementation of Special Autonomy and the Role of Gampong Government: A Study of Sharia and Religious Moderation in Aceh," *Samarah* 9, no. 2 (2025): 714–36, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v9i2.27063>.

⁶ A Faisal et al., "Sociological and Political Constraints of Islamic Sharia Enforcement in South Sulawesi Indonesia," *Juris: Jurnal Ilmiah Syariah* 22, no. 1 (2023): 159–69, <https://doi.org/10.31958/juris.v22i1.8604>; Mukhlis et al., "Challenges in Implementing Sharia-Based Education: Balancing Regional Autonomy and Children's Rights in Aceh," *Khazanah Hukum* 7, no. 1 (2025): 105–20, <https://doi.org/10.15575/kh.v7i1.41012>.

⁷ R Shah and M Lopes Cardozo, "Education and Social Change in Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Aceh, Indonesia," *International Journal of Educational Development* 38 (2014): 2–12, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2014.06.005>.

⁸ Cejudo and Michel, "Addressing Fragmented Government Action: Coordination, Coherence, and Integration."

⁹ B Benito, M.-D. Guillamón, and A.-M. Ríos, "Between Commitment and Inertia: Structural Gaps in Spain's Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2024)," *Sustainability* 18, no. 7 (2026): 3383, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su18073383>; P Flamand, R Vanderlinde, and M Tuytens, "Towards Program Coherence in Secondary Teacher Education: A Leadership Perspective," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 160 (2025): 105030, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.105030>; B Kosová and I Kovalčíková, "Striving for Policy Coherence and Implementational Consistency: Teacher Education in Slovakia," in *Research, Policymaking, and Innovation: Teacher and Education Development in Belt and Road Countries* (Springer, 2023), 63–79, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4349-2_4.

that the text of the law does not set policy.¹⁰ Frontline actors interpret and implement it under limited resources, ambiguous guidance, and competing demands, and the sum of their discretion becomes the policy citizens actually experience.¹¹ The scope of that discretion is not fixed; it expands where technical direction from above is thin, resulting in identical policies producing different practices across schools.¹²

Discretion without shared standards tends to produce decoupling: organizations facing mandates they cannot or will not fully absorb adopt the outward forms of a mandate while leaving core practices untouched.¹³ In this setting, the risk is concrete: Islamic integration can appear as dress codes, routine religious practice, and added religious-studies hours rather than as values built into the design and pedagogy of general subjects, the standard the Qanun itself sets.

The Indonesian and Acehnese literature has largely overlooked one consequence of this pattern: its effect on religious-minority students. When discretion, not uniform standards, governs implementation, the treatment a minority student receives depends more on which school they attend than on any systemically guaranteed right. Whether an Islamic-education mandate is enacted inclusively or exclusively is therefore a question of educational justice, not an administrative detail.¹⁴ Recent Indonesian work on religious moderation and interfaith tolerance has begun to address this, but rarely reaches concrete

¹⁰ M Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (30th Anniversary Expanded Ed.)* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2010).

¹¹ G Lotta and C Kirschbaum, "How Street-Level Bureaucrats Use Conceptual Systems to Categorise Clients," *Policy & Politics* 49, no. 4 (2021): 531–51, <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557321X16292224578150>; I Taylor and J Kelly, "Professionals, Discretion and Public Sector Reform in the UK: Re-Visiting Lipsky," *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 19, no. 7 (2006): 629–42, <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513550610704662>.

¹² D L Ball, "2018 AERA Presidential Address, Discretionary Spaces: The Power of Teaching in the Struggle for Justice in and through Public Education," *Educational Researcher* 55, no. 3 (2026): 155–72, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X251389934>; P Hupe, "The Relative Autonomy of Street-Level Bureaucrats," in *Handbook of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Politics, Resources, Power* (Edward Elgar, 2025), 152–78, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781803927046.00019>; H.-C. Schnack, "Testing the Spaces of Discretion: School Personnel as Implementers of Minority-Language Policy in China," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 45, no. 1 (2016): 43–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261604500104>.

¹³ O Hazir, Y Alan, and Y Gunlu, "Policy–Practice Decoupling in Turkish Teacher Education: Ceremonial Conformity in Inclusive Pedagogy," *Frontiers in Education* 11 (2026): 1782337, <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2026.1782337>; A Poole and T Bunnell, "Diluting, Decoupling, and Dovetailing: Considering New Metaphors for Understanding the Changing International School Landscape in China," *Journal of Research in International Education* 22, no. 1 (2023): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409231160710>.

¹⁴ L Franken and P Loobuyck, "Neutrality and Impartiality in RE: An Impossible Aim?," *British Journal of Religious Education* 39, no. 1 (2017): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2016.1218219>.

school-level implementation.¹⁵ These distributive consequences are hard to see from above, and theory explains why: implementers read the absence of complaints as evidence that policy is working. The literature on organizational voice and silence warns against that inference. Van Dyne et al.'s¹⁶ typology, applied to education by Billah et al.,¹⁷ and reviewed by Morrison, distinguishes acquiescent silence (staying quiet due to futility or not knowing how) from genuine satisfaction.¹⁸ Fernando and Prasad show how organizational conditions can move the disadvantaged toward reluctant acquiescence that is not consent.¹⁹

This article makes three moves. Empirically, it maps how the Sisdiknas–Qanun integration is enacted in a policy area studied mostly from the top down. Theoretically, it specifies a boundary condition for street-level bureaucracy: discretion ceases to be benign adaptation and becomes distributive inequality when the underlying client need is homogeneous across sites but technical guidance is absent; it also shows how acquiescent silence, usually treated as an individual-level construct, can be traced to institutional conditions documented at the oversight level. Analytically, it treats "no complaints" not as a finding but as a claim to be tested against the narrated experience of those most likely to have complaints.

The study is set in Subulussalam City for a specific reason. The city is overwhelmingly Muslim, with a small non-Muslim (mostly Protestant) minority of roughly 2–3%, yet it borders North Sumatra and fully implements the provincial Islamic-education mandate. This combination places a very small minority inside a Sharia-framed education mandate. The consequences of implementation become visible precisely where

¹⁵ Muhaemin et al., "Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education as a Response to Intolerance Attitudes in Indonesian Educational Institutions," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 14, no. 2 (2023): 253–74; M Rahmat et al., "Religiosity and Interfaith Tolerance among Students in Indonesian Islamic and General Junior Secondary Schools," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 1 (2025): 115–32, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v11i1.44660>.

¹⁶ L Van Dyne, S Ang, and I C Botero, "Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs," *Journal of Management Studies* 40, no. 6 (2003): 1359–92, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-6486.00384>.

¹⁷ M Billah, A Martin-Sardesai, and Z U Ahmed, "Silent Resistance to Organizational Change, an Australian Perspective," *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting and Financial Management* 37, no. 6 (2025): 156–74, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBAFM-03-2024-0043>.

¹⁸ E W Morrison, "Employee Voice and Silence," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 1 (2014): 173–97, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-031413-091328>.

¹⁹ D Fernando and A Prasad, "Sex-Based Harassment and Organizational Silencing: How Women Are Led to Reluctant Acquiescence in Academia," *Human Relations* 72, no. 10 (2019): 1565–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718809164>.

the minority has the least voice and is easiest to overlook. Institutional conditions here likely widen the scope for discretion: minimal technical guidance, a shortage of specialized teachers, and limited oversight capacity. Taking regulatory alignment as given, the study asks whether it translates into coherent practice, why or why not, and who bears the consequences.

Three questions guide the analysis: RQ-1: How is the integration of the National Education System and the Aceh Education Qanun implemented across the SMAN sector of Subulussalam City? RQ-2: What roles do school leaders (principals and vice-principals), teachers, and the Regional Education Council (MPD) play in implementing and overseeing this integration? RQ-3: What factors facilitate and hinder the integration of the two policy frameworks?

Research Methods

The study uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical design, framed as a single instrumental case study with embedded units.²⁰ The bounded case is not a single school but the implementation of the Sisdiknas–Qanun integration mandate across the public senior high school (SMAN) sector of one city, Subulussalam; each SMAN is an embedded unit examined at varying depths according to accessibility and analytical relevance.

This follows from the research problem. The three questions concern not what the regulations stipulate but how those provisions are interpreted and implemented by actors in the field, so the unit of analysis is the practice of implementation, not the text of the regulations, consistent with calls to study street-level bureaucracy through its interpretive dimension.²¹ Treating the city rather than each school as the case has two consequences that are the design's strengths. *First*, holding the policy regime constant (one province, one city, one Qanun) means that variation across embedded units can be attributed to school-level discretion rather than to policy differences. *Second*, it transparently reflects asymmetric data: documentary coverage of the city's SMAN approaches a census, while interview depth varies across schools. Variation between schools is thus a finding, not the product of a maximum-variation sampling frame.

²⁰ R E Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Sage, 1995); Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018).

²¹ M Rowe, *Researching Street-Level Bureaucracy: Bringing out the Interpretive Dimensions* (Routledge, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003292845>.

Subulussalam City, Aceh, was selected purposively for analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. The city is nearly homogeneous, about 97% Muslim, with a non-Muslim (mostly Protestant) minority of roughly 2–3%, yet it borders North Sumatra and fully implements the provincial Islamic-education mandate. It comprises five subdistricts (Simpang Kiri, Penanggalan, Rundeng, Sultan Daulat, Longkib), across which the city's public senior high schools are distributed under the Aceh Education Office.

The city has eight state senior high schools, confirmed against the national school database (Dapodik) and listed in Table 1. Seven of the eight contributed primary data (management interviews and/or student accounts); the eighth (SD-07, Longkib) was not directly sampled, so documentary coverage is a near-census of the sector, while interview depth varies across schools (Table 3).

Table 1.
The public senior high school sector of Subulussalam City

Code	Official school name	NPSN	Subdistrict
SD-01	SMA Negeri 1 Simpang Kiri	10104040	Simpang Kiri
SD-02	SMA Negeri 2 Simpang Kiri	69822414	Simpang Kiri
SD-03	SMA Negeri Unggul Subulussalam	10107804	Simpang Kiri
SD-04	SMA Negeri 1 Sultan Daulat	10104044	Sultan Daulat
SD-05	SMA Negeri 8 Subulussalam	69981914	Sultan Daulat
SD-06	SMA Negeri 1 Rundeng	10104059	Rundeng
SD-07	SMA Negeri 1 Longkib	10111320	Longkib
SD-08	SMA Negeri 1 Penanggalan	69864676	Penanggalan

Disclosure and protection. Because the study involves a minor from a very small religious minority, the two non-Muslim students are not mapped to a specific school in the Findings; their accounts are attributed only to "the Simpang Kiri schools" (SD-01/SD-02) collectively. School-level structural information on minority provision is reported without naming the school, sourced from administrators speaking in their capacity as public officials. Given the size of the minority at a single site, complete de-identification is not attainable; the residual risk is acknowledged.

Participants were purposively selected to represent three levels of the implementation chain: policy/oversight, school-level enactment (management and teaching), and direct experience, so that the same phenomenon could be viewed from different vertical positions. At the direct-experience level, recruitment specifically targeted students from the religious minority, who are most likely to experience the distributive consequences of implementation.

Table 2.
Participants by level of analysis (N = 13)

Level	Participant	n	Role in analysis
Policy/oversight	Chair, Regional Education Council (MPD), Subulussalam	1	City-level oversight and recommendation
	Provincial Education Council (MPA), Banda Aceh	1	Provincial reference point for the Qanun framework
School-level enactment	Principal, SD-03; vice-principal (curriculum, also a subject teacher), SD-01; vice-principal (student affairs), SD-08	3	De facto interpreters of policy at the school level
	General-subject teacher, SD-08	1	Classroom-level enactment of values in general subjects
Direct experience	Non-Muslim (Protestant) students, Simpang Kiri schools (SD-01/SD-02)	2	Students most exposed to the distributive consequences of the mandate
	Muslim students (SD-04, SD-05, SD-06, SD-08)	4	Majority perspective on practice and interpretation
	Parent/guardian (Muslim)	1	Household-level perspective
Total		13	

Note. School codes follow Table 1. To reduce the risk of re-identification, the two non-Muslim students are not linked to a specific school

Table 3.
Data contributed by embedded unit

Code	School	Depth	Data contributed
SD-01	SMA Negeri 1 Simpang Kiri	In depth	Vice-principal (curriculum, also a subject teacher); documentary (dress code, PPDB rules)
SD-02	SMA Negeri 2 Simpang Kiri	Moderate	(see minority-student note)
SD-03	SMA Negeri Unggul Subulussalam	Moderate	Principal; documentary (Tahfidz flagship program)
SD-04	SMA Negeri 1 Sultan Daulat	Student-level	1 Muslim student
SD-05	SMA Negeri 8 Subulussalam	Student-level	1 Muslim student
SD-06	SMA Negeri 1 Rundeng	Student-level	1 Muslim student
SD-07	SMA Negeri 1 Longkib	Not sampled	—
SD-08	SMA Negeri 1 Penanggalan	Moderate	Vice-principal (student affairs); a general-subject teacher; 1 Muslim student; documentary (Ramadan <i>dinul Islam</i> program)

Note: Teachers were included among the research subjects: the vice principal of SD-01 also teaches general subjects, and a general subject teacher was interviewed at SD-08. The two non-Muslim students attend two schools in Simpang Kiri (SD-01 and SD-02); to reduce the risk of re-identification, information for each student was not linked to a specific school. Policy level (not school): MPD Subulussalam, MPA Aceh.

Data came primarily from semi-structured interviews, supplemented by school documents (dress-code rules, enrollment regulations, program records) and policy documents: Sisdiknas (Law 20/2003); Law 11/2006 on the Government of Aceh; Qanun 11/2014 on Education; and Qanun 9/2015 (the institutional basis of the MPD). A flexible guide addressed the three research questions while allowing participants to raise their own concerns. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Document analysis served two purposes: to establish the regulatory benchmarks against which practice could be compared, and to verify participants' accounts of what the policies require.

Transcripts and documents were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification),²² combined with Braun and Clarke's thematic coding.²³ Coding was inductive; the coherence and street-level frameworks served as sensitizing concepts that focused interpretation without predetermining codes. Cross-level comparison (policy–management–experience) was used explicitly to identify convergence and divergence between narratives, and conclusions were iteratively verified against the data throughout collection and analysis.

Following Lincoln and Guba,²⁴ credibility rests on vertical triangulation (the same implementation questions examined at policy/oversight, management, and direct-experience levels), with document analysis corroborating claims about what the policies require; disconfirming accounts (one minority student's largely positive account; the other's own non-grievance answers on most dimensions) were retained rather than discarded. Transferability is supported by a thick description of the setting and embedded units. Dependability and confirmability rest on an audit trail that links each coded claim to transcript lines and documents analytic decisions.

Results

The analysis addresses the three research questions in turn. For each finding, we report evidence, pattern, and interpretation as distinct layers, and, where the same issue was examined at more than one level, we display the policy, management, and experience

²² Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Washington: SAGE Publications, 2014).

²³ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101.

²⁴ Yvonna Lincoln and Egon G Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage publications, 1985).

accounts in parallel so that convergence and divergence are visible rather than asserted. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian; quotations are the authors' translations, with selected original wording retained in brackets. To protect the minors involved, the two non-Muslim students' accounts are not tied to a named school.

The Legal Benchmark

Because this is a policy-implementation study, the Qanun functions as an analytical benchmark rather than as background. Table 4 sets its specific requirements against observed practice; the sections that follow supply the evidence behind each row.

Table 4.
Policy-implementation comparison

Requirement (Qanun 11/2014)	Expected at school	Observed	Gap
Pasal 2, asas include <i>justice</i> and <i>non-discrimination</i>	Equal, non-discriminatory provision for all students	Minority provision varies by school	Variation departs from the Qanun's <i>own</i> principles
Pasal 5(2), "Islamic and integrated"	Integration into the pedagogy of all subjects	Add-on routines + separate subjects	"Integrated" reduced to co-presence
Pasal 44, whole curriculum Islamic; core Islamic subjects (fiqh, aqidah, akhlak, Qur'an–Hadith, Arabic, Islamic history) in all public schools	Full set of mandated subjects + curricular redesign	Only Aqidah Akhlak (grade 10) + Arabic, assigned by teacher availability	Most mandated subjects are absent; no redesign
Pasal 7(1), right to quality <i>and</i> Islamic education for all	Guaranteed for all, incl. minorities' own faith	Minority instruction school-dependent	Right is not uniformly guaranteed
Pasal 9, Islamic dress for Muslim students	Enforced	Enforced; signed at enrolment; daily checks	Implemented

Integration Realized as a Visible Routine, not a Curricular Design (RQ1)

School documents and interview accounts across the sector show a strikingly uniform menu of visible religious programming prayer before and after class, tadarus (Qur'an recitation), congregational prayer for Muslim students, the Tahsin–Tahfidz program, observance of Islamic holidays, use of the school *mushalla*, and an Islamic dress code, recurring at every SMAN regardless of subdistrict or intake. Dress is not left to habit but is formalized. One vice-principal explained that at enrollment incoming students "sign on stamped paper," agreeing to the school's Islamic dress rules, and that a morning duty teacher checks compliance at the gate.

What is largely absent is the curricular core specified by the Qanun. Islamic content in *general* subjects surfaced only as spoken reminders. A Muslim student described it this way: "teachers connect lessons to religious values, for example, teaching honesty, responsibility, and respecting teachers." A general-subject teacher gave the same account from the teacher's side, describing the aim as tying ordinary lessons to Islamic values so that students are not only academically able but also of good character, value transmission as exhortation and example rather than as a redesign of what is taught. The formal local-content slot, meanwhile, was filled pragmatically rather than by design. A vice-principal responsible for curriculum explained that the school offered *aqidah akhlak* for grade 10 and Arabic, but that staffing, not the mandate, drove the choice: "we match our curriculum to the teachers we have (*sesuaikan kurikulum kita dengan SDM guru*). Students, for their part, experienced the programming as routine detached from its rationale: "we know the activities more than their legal basis," one said, and another observed that "students are used to it and don't really think about its meaning (*tidak terlalu memikirkan maknanya*)."

Across documents, management interviews, and student accounts, the same shape appears: integration is dense and standardized at the level of visible activity and dress, and thin to absent at the level of curriculum design and the pedagogy of general subjects. The documentary uniformity corroborates, rather than merely echoes, the interview accounts.

The observable forms of the mandate are in place, while its more demanding technical requirement, Islamic values built into the design of general subjects (Pasal 44), is not. In Cejudo and Michel's terms, this is precisely where internal coherence outruns implementation coherence; whether it also amounts to *decoupling* is examined, with the necessary caution, in the Discussion.²⁵

A guidance Vacuum Widens School-Level Discretion (RQ2)

The oversight body's own account is the clearest evidence that no technical layer translates the Qanun into classroom practice. The MPD chair located the council entirely outside implementation: "we do not execute; we are a mediator, facilitator, supervisor, and evaluator." Its instruments proved far narrower than its formal mandate. Reporting is "not systematic; anything goes, even just verbally"; formal recommendations to the

²⁵ Cejudo and Michel, "Addressing Fragmented Government Action: Coordination, Coherence, and Integration."

mayor go out "once a year," and, when asked for a single concrete recommendation on a specific issue during his tenure, the chair answered plainly: "none yet (*belum ada*).\" Most tellingly for implementation, no technical guideline, local curriculum, or teaching material exists to operationalize "Islamic and integrated": "as far as I know, there is none, and even if there were, it hasn't been passed on to us ... we don't even have the textbooks (*buku aja paket kita nggak ada*).\"

This vacuum is felt directly at the school level, where school leaders become the *de facto* interpreters of the Qanun. Management accounts show each school reading the same mandate through its own staffing and resources: one school building a tahfidz flagship with external tutors, another fitting Arabic into a "cross-interest" slot because it happened to have an Arabic teacher. With no technical direction from above, interpretation devolves to the front line, and one city produces several implementation models based on a single Qanun.

This is the mechanism Lipsky describes, sharpened by the literature on how the *scope* of discretion tracks the guidance surrounding it: where technical direction is minimal, front-line actors fill the gap with their own interpretations,²⁶ so that a nominally identical policy yields divergent practice.²⁷ The consequences of that divergence for minority students are the subject of the next finding.

The Same Need, Different Provision: Minority Students Across Schools (RQ1 & RQ3)

Administrators described materially different arrangements for an identical situation. At one school, no Christian-religion teacher is provided; a vice-principal explained, "We are not ready to provide a Christian religion teacher, there simply are no human resources for it (*tidak ada SDM-nya*).\" Hence, grades are outsourced: "if they want a grade, it comes from their pastor at church.\" During the Muslim Tahsin–Tahfidz sessions, non-Muslim students are placed in a separate room and taught English, an arrangement the same official reframed as an advantage: "they get a bigger portion (of English), and naturally they do better at it (*dapat porsi lebih besar ... lebih bagus*).\" At

²⁶ Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (30th Anniversary Expanded Ed.)*.

²⁷ Ball, "2018 AERA Presidential Address, Discretionary Spaces: The Power of Teaching in the Struggle for Justice in and through Public Education"; Hupe, "The Relative Autonomy of Street-Level Bureaucrats"; Schnack, "Testing the Spaces of Discretion: School Personnel as Implementers of Minority-Language Policy in China."

another school, by contrast, a religion teacher for minority students is said to be arranged through the Education Office in cooperation with the church. At a third, a tahfidz flagship, accommodation for minorities did not come up at all. Officials uniformly denied any problem: "We practice tolerance well here ... justice exists here (*keadilan itu ada di sini*)," said one, adding the majority's rationale for the whole arrangement, "if we don't uphold the religion, who will? Here we are, we say, 99% Muslim."

The student accounts both confirm the structural picture and complicate the officials' reading of it. One minority student described having no religion class of their own and merely auditing the Islamic lesson: "the religion teacher said it's fine to just stay in class and listen, but we don't really study"; on assessment, "we don't take the exam ... and the grade doesn't count (*nilai nggak masuk*)." This student attends the school whose official described church-supplied grades; that arrangement, however, is conditional on the student's initiative (if they want a grade), and in this student's experience no grade was recorded. The gap between the arrangement as described and as experienced is itself part of the finding: a provision that depends on the student's initiative leaves the default outcome ungraded. Asked what felt off, they returned to that one concrete point, "we sit in on their lesson, but we get no grade, so it feels kind of" (the sentence trailed off), and offered an unprompted suggestion: "if possible, just separate us (*kalah bisa dipisah aja*)," with their own schedule. On every other dimension, this same student reported no grievance: the dress code was "comfortable, more covered, so actually nicer," achievement was treated "equally," and friendships were "fine." The other minority student described the opposite experience: attending Christian religious instruction and feeling respected, while wishing for a dedicated space "so I don't feel like a stranger in (their) own school."

Reading the three levels together makes the finding precise. The *need* is constant across schools (instruction and assessment for a few non-Muslim students under a Sharia-framed mandate); the *provision* is not (a school-arranged teacher a conditional church-supplied grade with English substitution that, in practice, left one student ungraded; or no stated arrangement) and the *official interpretation* (justice exists here) is contradicted less by the students' words than by the structural fact that access depends on which building a student happens to enter.

In the absence of a common standard, the handling of an identical minority need tracks each school's staffing and each principal's reading, not the students' circumstances.

This is consistent with school-level discretion operating without technical guidance, and it is reported as a case-based illustration rather than a general condition among minority students across Aceh. One caution is essential and is stated here rather than deferred to the limitations: in the interview, the evaluative terms "unfairness" and "discrimination" were introduced by the interviewer, and the student assented ("yes"; "I have") rather than volunteering them; on directly relevant probes (whether they had ever wanted their own teacher, or had felt discriminated against in achievement), the same student answered "never" and "no." The interpretation, therefore, rests on the *behavioral* record (an ungraded audit; never reported; normalized "since childhood"), not on the prompted labels. The Discussion develops this reading against street-level theory.

The Absence of Complaints, and How it is Produced (RQ2 & RQ3)

This finding is the study's strongest because the same silence is visible and partly explained at all three levels at once.

1. Policy (oversight). The MPD chair read the quiet as success: across five years, he had seen "no complaint, no problem, no expectation, none," concluding that "people are fine ... that is our data and facts (data dan fakta)." Yet in the same interview he supplied the conditions that make that inference unsafe: reporting is "not systematic ... verbally is fine"; the public barely knows the council exists, "let alone the public, even the schools don't understand" where to take a concern, so "schools complain to the Education Office" instead of the MPD, when "they ought to complain to us." He even named the latent issue himself: "Aceh is not automatically 100% Muslim ... we hope that someone would report to us so that we could mediate."
2. Management. School administrators likewise reported an empty channel as evidence of harmony: "There are no discrimination reports, thank God, none," and "If you mean discrimination cases, there are none here."
3. Experience. The minority student had never raised the ungraded-audit issue with anyone, and explained why in terms of habituation rather than satisfaction: "No, because it's been this way since primary school; I'm used to it, and I'm comfortable with my friends."

The three accounts converge on a single structure: no recognized channel connects a private concern to institutional feedback; the concern is denied from above and normalized from below. The absence of complaints is thus not independent evidence of contentment; it is what this configuration would produce, whether or not anyone was content.

The organizational voice-and-silence literature names the risk. Van Dyne et al.'s acquiescent silence (staying quiet from resignation or from not knowing how) is precisely the category the student's I'm used to it occupies,²⁸ and Morrison's review warns against reading silence as consent.²⁹ Fernando and Prasad's reluctant acquiescence (quiet produced by organizational conditions rather than agreement) fits a setting in which the channel is unknown and the issue has been normalized since childhood; Billah et al. document the same dynamic in education.³⁰ What the data support is the calibrated claim that the conditions under which silence could be mistaken for consent are present, and are partly conceded by the oversight body itself, not the stronger claim that the institution deliberately engineered the silence.

Supporting and Hindering Factors (RQ3)

Implementation runs without open friction because the Muslim majority broadly endorses it, and families reinforce it. A parent was explicit that the Islamic programming was "not a burden; it actually helps form character," and described visible change at home, "more disciplined, more used to worship, more courteous." A border-region culture of everyday tolerance lets Muslim and Christian students, in one student's words, "study together and joke around" without conflict.

The barriers are structural. There is no technical guideline for translating "Islamic and integrated" into cross-subject practice. Teacher supply is stretched across three fronts at once: a shortage of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers that raises the workload of those in post, a shortage of Islamic guidance-and-counselling teachers, and the absence of Christian-religion teachers in several schools. This last gap is what pushes provision for non-Muslim students onto churches and English substitution. The MPD's capacity and budget are thin, and neither the public nor, by the chair's own account, the schools know

²⁸ Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero, "Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs."

²⁹ Morrison, "Employee Voice and Silence."

³⁰ Billah, Martin-Sardesai, and Ahmed, "Silent Resistance to Organizational Change, an Australian Perspective."

the oversight and reporting mechanisms. A parent independently identified the softer version of the same problem: "The obstacle is consistency, from both the school and parents." The barriers are therefore not only about resources but also about a feedback system that cannot surface, let alone correct, the variation documented in the other findings. Notably, the study found no evidence of deliberate discriminatory practice; the problem it documents is structural under-provision, not intent, a distinction that keeps the account calibrated to what the data support.

Discussion

Read through the study's two frameworks, policy coherence and street-level bureaucracy, the findings answer the three research questions directly: the alignment between Sisdiknas and the Aceh Education Qanun holds at the level of design but not at the level of practice. The section follows one causal chain rather than three separate arguments: regulatory alignment, in the absence of technical guidance, widens the discretionary space available to schools; where the underlying need is the same across schools, that unguided discretion produces not adaptation but uneven access to the same entitlement; and a weak, largely unknown feedback channel keeps the variation from being reported upward, so it is neither seen nor corrected. Each subsection develops a single link and puts it in dialogue with prior work.

Coherence Achieved in Design, Lost in Implementation

Internally, the two systems intersect: the Sisdiknas goal of faith and character aligns with the Qanun's "Islamic and integrated" mandate, so internal coherence is largely met.³¹ What schools deliver, however, is the visible residue of that coherence. The documented uniformity (identical routines and a signed dress code across the sector), set against the near-total absence of curricular redesign, is the signature of a mandate absorbed at its most visible and least demanding margin. Adding religious hours and enforcing dress are low-cost, high-visibility signals of compliance; redesigning the pedagogy of general subjects (Pasal 44) is neither, and it is the part that did not happen.

We read this as consistent with decoupling: the adoption of the observable forms of a mandate while core technical activity remains unchanged. Still, we hold this reading tentatively, for reasons the evidence makes clear. Hazir et al. could show *ceremonial*

³¹ Cejudo and Michel, "Addressing Fragmented Government Action: Coordination, Coherence, and Integration."

conformity in Turkish teacher education because their data reached teachers' actual classroom practice; our data establish the *absence* of curricular integration but not a deliberate intent to keep a compliant surface over an unchanged core, which a strong decoupling claim requires.³² The pattern is equally consistent with a capacity gap: no one has translated the mandate into teachable form, exactly as the MPD chair conceded ("we don't even have the textbooks"). Poole and Bunnell's trio of diluting, decoupling, and dovetailing cautions against collapsing several mechanisms into one label, and the visible practices are not necessarily empty: habituation can shape dispositions,³³ as the character-education tradition holds,³⁴ and a parent and students described the routines as meaningful. Decoupling is therefore the most parsimonious reading available, not a demonstrated intention.

A sharper point comes from the Qanun itself. Its stated principles (Pasal 2) include justice and non-discrimination, and Pasal 7(1) extends the right to education to every Acehnese. The school-dependent provision for minority students is therefore not only a divergence from national law but an *internal* incoherence within the Qanun's own value set: design and enactment part company on the Qanun's own terms. This reframing matters because it does not depend on the thin minority-experience evidence; it follows from the documented structural variation set against the text.

When Discretion Stops Being Adaptation: a Boundary Condition

Lipsky established that policy is remade at the front line; the guidance-vacuum finding reconfirms this in detail, down to the MPD's self-description as evaluator rather than executor.³⁵ The contribution here is not that discretion produces variation; that is well documented for nominally identical mandates, from accountability policy in Israel, Amdur & Mero-Jaffe,³⁶ to immigrant-integration policy across Israeli schools and

³² Hazir, Alan, and Gunlu, "Policy-Practice Decoupling in Turkish Teacher Education: Ceremonial Conformity in Inclusive Pedagogy."

³³ Poole and Bunnell, "Diluting, Decoupling, and Dovetailing: Considering New Metaphors for Understanding the Changing International School Landscape in China."

³⁴ Thomas Lickona, "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education," *Journal of Moral Education* 25, no. 1 (1996): 93–100.

³⁵ Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services (30th Anniversary Expanded Ed.)*.

³⁶ L Amdur and I Mero-Jaffe, "Interrelations between Policymakers' Intentions and School Agents' Interpretation of Accountability Policy in Israel," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 25 (2017): 84, <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.25.3016>.

minority-language policy in China,³⁷ where Schnack shows that minimal technical direction leaves staff to fill the gap, so that one policy yields many practices.³⁸ Our case sits squarely in that lineage, but it specifies *when* the resulting variation should be read as inequality rather than as responsiveness.

Classic and recent street-level accounts treat discretion as morally ambiguous and often benign: workers tailor rules to the particular client, and variation reads as adaptation. Ball makes the double valence explicit, theorizing discretionary spaces as "both a risk and a resource." Our case identifies the condition that tips the balance toward risk.³⁹ Here, the same across schools: instruction and fair assessment for non-Muslim students under a Sharia-framed mandate. Yet the arrangements diverge sharply (a school-arranged teacher, a church-supplied grade with English substitution, an ungraded audit, or no arrangement). What differs is not the need but the staffing and interpretation each principal brings to an identical problem when shared guidance is absent. Under that condition, discretion does not individualize a service to fit a need; it distributes the same entitlement unequally. The proposition the case adds is therefore conditional: discretion functions as adaptation when it tracks real differences between clients, and as distributive inequality when it tracks only differences between implementers facing the same client need. The scope of that discretion is itself set by the guidance vacuum above it.⁴⁰ This is how regulatory alignment at the top can coexist with, and even generate, unequal treatment at the bottom.

The claim is calibrated to what the evidence carries. The structural variation is documented at the management level, from administrators speaking as public officials, and is the firm basis for the distributive reading; the student accounts illustrate what that variation feels like from the receiving end but cannot, alone, establish its prevalence, the more so because, as the minority-provision finding shows, the evaluative vocabulary in one account was interviewer-introduced. The defensible formulation is that the case illustrates variation in access to an identical entitlement across schools in the absence of

³⁷ A Binhas, "Variations in School-Level Implementation of Immigrant Integration Policy in the Israeli Education System," *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2026.2679001>.

³⁸ Schnack, "Testing the Spaces of Discretion: School Personnel as Implementers of Minority-Language Policy in China."

³⁹ Ball, "2018 AERA Presidential Address, Discretionary Spaces: The Power of Teaching in the Struggle for Justice in and through Public Education."

⁴⁰ Hupe, "The Relative Autonomy of Street-Level Bureaucrats"; Schnack, "Testing the Spaces of Discretion: School Personnel as Implementers of Minority-Language Policy in China."

standardized arrangements, not that minority students across Aceh systematically experience discrimination. Notably, the officials' own "justice exists here" is refuted not by a student's grievance but by their own description of a church-outsourced grade that is conditional on the student's initiative and a separate room: the inequality is structural before it is ever felt.

Silence, Feedback, and the Limits of no Complaints

Officials at both the oversight and school levels read the absence of complaints as evidence that policy works; the voice-and-silence literature warns precisely against that inference.⁴¹ The case's distinctive contribution is that the conditions producing the silence are not inferred by the researchers but supplied by the authority itself: the MPD chair described an unsystematic, largely unknown reporting channel, conceded that "even the schools" do not know where to take a concern, and still concluded that the community was "fine ... data and facts." That juxtaposition (the same speaker naming the broken channel and reading the resulting quiet as consent) is stronger evidence than the generic proposition that silence need not mean satisfaction, because it removes the researcher as the sole source of the skeptical reading.

Two moves keep the claim proportionate. *First*, the mechanism is named at the right level: Fernando and Prasad's *reluctant acquiescence* describes quiet produced by organizational conditions rather than agreement, and the student's account, normalized "since childhood," never voiced, with no known channel to voice it through, is a clear instance,⁴² extending an individual-level construct to a condition documented at the oversight level.⁴³ *Second*, the case does *not* support the stronger claim that the institution deliberately manufactured the silence; nothing in the data establishes intent. The warranted conclusion is the calibrated one: the conditions under which silence could be mistaken for consent are present and are partly acknowledged by the body best placed to interpret it. This also bears on how oversight bodies read feedback: an absence read as a signal is, here, an artifact of missing instrumentation.

⁴¹ Morrison, "Employee Voice and Silence"; Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero, "Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs."

⁴² Fernando and Prasad, "Sex-Based Harassment and Organizational Silencing: How Women Are Led to Reluctant Acquiescence in Academia."

⁴³ Van Dyne, Ang, and Botero, "Conceptualizing Employee Silence and Employee Voice as Multidimensional Constructs"; Billah, Martin-Sardesai, and Ahmed, "Silent Resistance to Organizational Change, an Australian Perspective."

Situating The Case in Aceh, Indonesia, and Beyond

These findings extend and complicate the existing discourse. Aceh's special autonomy has shaped governance, budgeting, and Sharia enforcement⁴⁴ within a field whose capacity and legitimacy were reshaped by post-conflict and post-disaster trajectories;⁴⁵ the contribution here is to move down one level, from the content of Sharia-based education policy to its classroom enactment and its consequences for a minority. This connects the recurring national–subnational misalignment diagnosed by Fazlurrahman,⁴⁶ to the children's-rights and minority-rights concerns already raised for Aceh,⁴⁷ and supplies implementation-level evidence where the literature on religious moderation and interfaith tolerance in Indonesian schools has remained largely normative.⁴⁸ Framed as educational justice, whether a religious-education mandate is enacted inclusively or exclusively is constitutive rather than administrative;⁴⁹ the illusion of inclusivity observed here an inclusive narrative from above (justice exists here) set against a structure that makes access contingent on the school) is an instance of a general problem in diverse education systems, not an Aceh-specific anomaly. The mechanism the case isolates (homogeneous need plus a guidance vacuum, yielding distributive inequality through ordinary discretion) is potentially transferable to other decentralized systems that mandate religion-based education for a religiously plural student body.

Implications

The practical implications follow from the diagnosis rather than from general exhortation, and they target the gap between an aligned mandate and the coherent practice that discretion currently fills. Three tools address it directly: school-level guidance on what an "Islamic and integrated" curriculum means inside general subjects; standardized, publicly recognized channels for raising concerns about provision for minority students; and evaluation instruments that assess substance rather than the mere occurrence of

⁴⁴ Ayumiati et al., "Budget Management of the Aceh Government: An Analysis of the Maqāsid Al-Sharī'ah Approach"; Safrizal et al., "The Implementation of Special Autonomy and the Role of Gampong Government: A Study of Sharia and Religious Moderation in Aceh."

⁴⁵ Shah and Lopes Cardozo, "Education and Social Change in Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Aceh, Indonesia."

⁴⁶ Fazlurrahman, "Policy Disharmony in Indonesia (Dialectics of National Education Reform)."

⁴⁷ Mukhlis et al., "Challenges in Implementing Sharia-Based Education: Balancing Regional Autonomy and Children's Rights in Aceh."

⁴⁸ Muhaemin et al., "Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education as a Response to Intolerance Attitudes in Indonesian Educational Institutions"; Rahmat et al., "Religiosity and Interfaith Tolerance among Students in Indonesian Islamic and General Junior Secondary Schools."

⁴⁹ Franken and Loobuyck, "Neutrality and Impartiality in RE: An Impossible Aim?"

activities. Each maps onto a documented weakness, and each aims to close a technical gap now filled by improvisation and to ensure silence is no longer read automatically as satisfaction.

These recommendations should not be read as implying that technical guidance alone will resolve implementation issues. The same evidence points to constraints that guidance cannot remove: the shortage of teachers able to serve non-Muslim students, the MPD's limited capacity and budget, and thin awareness of reporting mechanisms. Technical guidance is a necessary condition for coherent implementation, not a sufficient one; without teacher supply, institutional capacity, and functioning feedback, guidelines risk becoming one more document adopted in form and decoupled in practice, which is the very pattern the study describes.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the minority-experience evidence rests on two students at one site, and in one interview the evaluative terms unfairness and discrimination were introduced by the interviewer; the distributive argument therefore rests on the structural variation reported by administrators rather than on the students' labels. Second, interview depth varied across schools, and one school (SD-07) was not sampled. Third, the data capture accounts of classroom practice rather than systematic classroom observation, so the study cannot decisively distinguish decoupling from a capacity gap. Future research could observe general-subject lessons directly, include more non-Muslim students and parents across several Acehnese districts, and test whether the proposed boundary condition holds in other decentralized systems that mandate religion-based education

Conclusion

This study asked not whether the National Education System and the Aceh Education Qanun agree on paper, but whether that agreement survives into the classroom. In Subulussalam, it did not. The two frameworks converge by design; the convergence dissolves in implementation. Schools enacted the mandate to educate "in an Islamic and integrated manner" as a dense, uniform layer of visible practices: prayer before and after class, congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, and a signed dress code. At the same time, its more demanding requirement, redesigning how general subjects are taught, went

largely untouched. Coherence was achieved where it was cheap to display and lost where it was costly to build.

Read through street-level bureaucracy, the case specifies when discretion turns from adaptation into inequality: where needs differ between clients, discretion tailors a service; where the need is identical across sites but no technical guidance exists, it distributes the same entitlement unequally. Consequently, the city's non-Muslim students found their access to instruction and fair assessment depending on which school they attended, not on a right that held everywhere. The near-absence of complaints, read by supervisors as success, is better explained by reporting channels so weak and little known that the oversight body itself conceded few would know how to use them: silence produced by missing instrumentation, not by contentment. This unevenness also runs counter to the Qanun's own principles of justice and non-discrimination.

The primary corrective is technical rather than political: guidance on what "Islamic and integrated" means within general-subject curricula, recognized channels for concerns, and evaluation of implementation outcomes. These findings rest on a few minority informants at one site, and some sensitive terms were interviewer-introduced; they are illustrative rather than representative. What the case establishes, and invites wider testing of, is a mechanism: a homogeneous need meeting a guidance vacuum, discretion converting it into unequal provision that no feedback channel corrects.

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Ethics Statement

This study involved human participants, including high school students under 18, and was conducted as part of a master's thesis at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University Jakarta, under academic supervision. The Faculty issued an official research permit (No. B-

1684/F1/KM.01.3/08/2025, 4 August 2025) to the Aceh Education Council (MPA), and the Subulussalam City Regional Education Council (MPD) confirmed in writing that fieldwork took place within its jurisdiction. Before each interview, participants were informed of the study's aims, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to decline or withdraw without consequence, and they consented to participation and audio recording. For students under 18, verbal consent was obtained from a parent or guardian, together with the student's own assent. Because the study concerns religious-minority experience in a near-homogeneous setting, re-identification was treated as the principal risk: students are identified only by role, minority students' accounts are not linked to named schools, narrowing attributes such as class and extracurricular role are omitted, and officials are identified by position rather than name. Given the size of the minority population, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed; disclosure was limited accordingly. Recordings and transcripts are accessible only to the research team.

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The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions

Rizki Amelia: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Writing, original draft, Writing – review & editing. Nurochim: Supervision, Conceptualization, Validation, Writing, review & editing. Sita Ratnaningsih: Supervision, Methodology, Validation, Writing, review & editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Claude (Anthropic) to assist with restructuring the manuscript in response to peer-review comments, language editing and translation, checking consistency across sections, and cross-checking in-text citations against the reference list. The tool was not used to collect, generate, or analyze research data. All interview quotations were checked against the original transcripts, and all interpretations, arguments, and conclusions are the authors' own. After using this tool,

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