

## **Adaptation Of Religious Patterns Of International Students In A Pesantren-Based Islamic Higher Education Environment At Universitas Islam Darul Ulum, Lamongan**

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the adaptation of religious patterns among international students within an Islamic education environment based on the pesantren system at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan. The pesantren environment is characterized by a structured religious life rooted in Indonesian Islamic traditions, which requires international students to adjust their religious understanding, practices, and attitudes. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design. The research subjects consist of eight international students from Southern Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation, and were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data display, and continuous conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that the adaptation of religious patterns among international students occurs gradually and dynamically. Differences in Islamic traditions, language, and religious culture, particularly the dominance of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) religious practices, constitute initial challenges in the adaptation process. However, social support from peers, lecturers, and the campus environment plays a significant role in assisting students to manage these differences in a moderate and reflective manner.

**Keywords:** Religious Adaptation; International Students; Islamic University.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis adaptasi pola keberagaman mahasiswa asing dalam lingkungan pendidikan Islam berbasis pesantren di Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA) Lamongan. Lingkungan pesantren memiliki sistem kehidupan religius yang terstruktur dan bercorak tradisi Islam Indonesia, sehingga mahasiswa asing menyesuaikan pemahaman, praktik, serta

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sikap keberagamaannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain deskriptif-eksploratif. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas delapan mahasiswa asing yang berasal dari Thailand Selatan, Malaysia, Filipina, dan Timor Leste. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi nonpartisipan, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan kesimpulan secara berkelanjutan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa adaptasi pola keberagaman mahasiswa asing berlangsung secara bertahap dan dinamis. Perbedaan latar belakang tradisi keislaman, bahasa, serta budaya religius, khususnya dominasi praktik keagamaan bercorak Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), menjadi tantangan awal bagi mahasiswa asing dalam proses adaptasi. Dukungan sosial dari teman sebaya, dosen, dan lingkungan kampus berperan signifikan dalam membantu mahasiswa mengelola perbedaan tersebut secara moderat dan reflektif.

**Kata Kunci:** Adaptasi Keberagaman; Mahasiswa Asing; Perguruan Tinggi Islam.

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## A. Introduction

Islamic education plays a strategic role in shaping the religious character of learners within the dynamics of globalization. Islamic educational institutions in the era of globalization are required to balance the preservation of religious values with the challenges of modernity and cultural plurality, so that they remain religiously relevant while being adaptive to contemporary demands (Rachman, 2025). Pesantren-based Islamic higher education institutions are oriented not only toward academic development but also toward character building and the formation of students' religious patterns through a structured understanding of Islamic values (Irpani, 2025). The pesantren-based education system places worship practices, religious culture, and spiritual life as integral components of the educational process (Nashihin et al., 2025).

Research findings indicate that pesantren-based Islamic higher education institutions continuously strive to adapt their curricula and educational practices through reforms in governance, curriculum, and learning processes, while maintaining core pesantren values to remain relevant amidst rapid socio-cultural changes. This adaptive strategy enables pesantren to preserve their cultural authenticity while competing within the modern educational landscape (Muttaqin, 2025). Adaptation in the educational

context is not only related to curriculum and institutions but also to individuals who interact and learn within them. International students, in the context of Islamic higher education, are subjects who experience complex adaptation processes. This adaptation encompasses social, cultural, and religious dimensions that are interconnected within campus life and the new social environment. Research shows that religiosity (faith and religious commitment) plays an important role as a key factor in the cross-cultural communication adaptation of international students in multicultural educational environments (Nadeem, 2022).

The adaptation process of international students in Islamic educational environments is closely related to adjustments in religious practices that differ from their cultural backgrounds. Studies on the social adaptation of international students in Islamic institutions in Indonesia show that they experience challenges in adjusting to language, social norms, and religious practices in their new environment (Maftuh, 2024). In the context of pesantren-based Islamic education, religious adaptation among international students becomes a crucial issue, as pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, possess distinctive religious life rhythms, including congregational worship, regular religious studies, and intensive religious social ethics. Pesantren are not only formal educational institutions but also living environments that require deep internalization of religious values and continuity in daily religious practices. The internalization of Islamic values in pesantren is not merely academic but also encompasses continuous religious practices that significantly influence students' attitudes, behaviors, and character in their daily lives (Suhartini, 2016).

Previous studies on students' social and cultural adaptation in higher education have been widely conducted (Maftuh, 2024; Mareza & Nugroho, 2017; Nadeem, 2022). However, research specifically examining the adaptation of religious patterns among international students in pesantren-based Islamic higher education remains limited. Therefore, comprehensive empirical studies are needed to understand how international students adjust their religious patterns within the reality of pesantren life, which is part of the Islamic educational tradition in Indonesia. Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA) is one of the Islamic higher education institutions that implements a

pesantren-based education system in Lamongan Regency. International students at UNISDA come from various countries, including Malaysia, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and the Philippines. This study aims to analyze how international students adapt their religious patterns within the pesantren-based Islamic educational environment at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum, Lamongan, in order to provide insights into effective strategies for religious adaptation in transnational Islamic education settings.

**B. Research Methods**

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of the adaptation process of religious patterns among international students in a pesantren-based Islamic higher education environment at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA), Lamongan. The qualitative approach was chosen as it enables researchers to explore meanings, experiences, and subjective dynamics encountered by research subjects within specific social and cultural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The subjects of this study consist of nine international students currently studying at UNISDA, while the object of the research focuses on patterns of religious adaptation, including their understanding, practices, attitudes, and religious experiences within a pesantren-based campus environment. The selection of respondents was conducted using a snowball sampling technique, in which initial respondents provided recommendations to identify other relevant informants who possess experiences aligned with the research focus (Sugiyono, 2019). The characteristics of the subjects are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Characteristics of Informants.

No	Initials	Gender	Country of Origin	Age	Study Program	Semester
1.	MA	M	Southern Thailand	20	Economics Managemen	Three
2.	MM	M	Philippines	25	English Education	Three
3	LM	F	Malaysia	23	English Education	Seven
4.	NDCPA	F	Timor Leste	17	Political Science	One
5.	AR	M	Philippines	25	Islamic	Three

No	Initials	Gender	Country of Origin	Age	Study Program	Semester
					Economics	
6.	M	F	Southern Thailand	21	English Education	Three
7.	M	M	Timor Leste	18	Engineering	One
8.	W	F	Southern Thailand	21	Islamic Education	One
9.	FA	M	Malaysia	24	English Education	Seven

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews aimed at obtaining rich and comprehensive data regarding the experiences of religious adaptation among international students. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing the researcher to have general guidelines while maintaining flexibility to explore emerging information during the research process.

In addition, the researcher employed non-participant observation and documentation as supporting data to strengthen the validity of the findings. Data analysis techniques include data reduction, data display, and continuous conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014).

The validity of the data was ensured through source and technique triangulation, so that the research findings are expected to achieve a sufficient level of credibility and reliability.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

#### **1. Motivation of International Students in Choosing UNISDA as an Islamic Higher Education Institution**

The research findings show that the majority of informants are male. Most students come from the Philippines and Thailand, with an average age of 21 years. The informants are enrolled in various study programs, including Economics Management, English Education, Political Science, Islamic Economics, and Islamic Education, with the majority being in their third semester.

The results indicate that most international students studying at UNISDA are scholarship recipients from their home countries. The reputation of UNISDA as an Islamic higher education institution that integrates academic education with Islamic values serves as a major attraction for international students.

“I want to study in a place that has academic knowledge and religious values.” (MM, 25 years).

“UNISDA is one of my choices because it provides an environment that upholds Islamic practices and values.” (FA, 24 years).

Religious considerations of the institution become a determining factor in students’ decision to pursue their studies at UNISDA. The academic environment, which emphasizes Islamic values, religious practices, and religious culture, is perceived as providing a sense of security, comfort, and alignment with the students’ religious identity as Muslims. This Islamic atmosphere is not only viewed as supporting academic activities but also as a strategic space for deepening the understanding and continuous practice of Islamic teachings.

In addition, initial information obtained from senior students regarding campus religious life plays an important role in strengthening prospective students’ confidence in choosing the institution, particularly for those from similar religious backgrounds, including students from Southern Thailand.

“...because I got information from a senior at UNISDA that there are international students from Patani (a friend’s name).” (FA, 24 years)

## 2. Adaptation of Religious Patterns Among International Students

The religious background of respondents prior to studying at UNISDA shows varying levels of understanding and practice of Islam. Some respondents were raised in Salafi traditions, emphasizing the practice of Islam based on the Qur’an and Sunnah according to the understanding of the Salaf. Others come from Muslim environments where religious practices are relatively simple and less intensive, although they possess basic knowledge of Islam.

The findings also reveal that some respondents grew up in devout Muslim families, particularly from Southern Thailand, where religious activities such as Qur'anic recitation, congregational prayer, and studying in Islamic boarding schools have been practiced since an early age. This indicates that students enter UNISDA with diverse religious backgrounds, both in terms of understanding and intensity of religious practices.

“I come from a devout Muslim family in Southern Thailand. Since childhood, I have been accustomed to religious activities such as reciting the Qur'an, performing congregational prayers, and studying in an Islamic boarding school.” (M, 18 years)

“I come from a Salafi background. I study Islam based on the Qur'an and Sunnah as understood by the early generations of Muslims. I regularly perform prayers, study aqidah and fiqh, and strive to follow Islamic teachings based on clear principles.” (MM, 25 years)

Students' adaptation in adjusting to the Islamic educational environment at UNISDA occurs dynamically, particularly in facing differences in religious traditions and culture. Students from Salafi backgrounds or from abroad initially experience culture shock and difficulties, as Islamic practices at UNISDA are largely influenced by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition, which has distinct ritual and cultural characteristics.

However, over time, these differences are gradually understood and accepted as part of learning religious diversity within Islam. The campus environment, which enforces discipline in religious activities such as congregational prayers and religious gatherings, is perceived both as a challenge and as a constructive experience, as it encourages students to adapt to a more structured religious lifestyle.

These findings indicate that students' initial adaptation at UNISDA involves not only academic adjustment but also the internalization of values, development of tolerance, and strengthening of religious experiences.

“At first, I felt surprised because the culture and system here are different from my home country, but over time I started to get used to it.” (M, 21 years)

“I am not yet familiar with certain methods and still have many things to learn because I have only been here for one year, and I want to observe more.” (MA, 20 years)

The findings also show that students perceive differences in religious understanding and practices between the Islamic educational environment at UNISDA and their home countries. These differences are particularly evident in the dominance of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)-based practices, such as qunut in the Fajr prayer, tahlilan, yasin recitation, grave visitation, and the more structured and systematic implementation of religious activities on campus.

For students from Salafi backgrounds or from environments with less intensive religious practices, these traditions represent new experiences that require adaptation and continuous understanding. However, some students do not perceive substantial theological differences, but rather differences in context and modes of religious practice.

This finding suggests that differences in religious practices at UNISDA are influenced not only by students' backgrounds but also by the institutional character of the campus, which shapes a more structured and culturally embedded pattern of religiosity.

“At first, I felt amazed and challenged. The campus environment is very disciplined in religious activities, such as congregational prayers and religious gatherings like manaqib, so I had to adjust to that rhythm.” (W, 21 years)

“Yes, there are differences. At UNISDA, religious practices are more structured and systematic, while in my home country they are more traditional and cultural.” (M, 18 years)

### 3. Challenges in the Process of Religious Adaptation Among International Students

The process of religious adaptation among students at UNISDA faces several challenges, including theological, linguistic, and cultural barriers. Differences in fiqh and religious practices constitute a primary obstacle, especially for students from different Islamic traditions, as they are required to maintain their personal beliefs while respecting the prevailing religious practices on campus.

In addition, limited proficiency in the Indonesian language becomes an initial barrier in understanding religious activities, communicating effectively, and building social relationships. Cultural differences, including daily habits such as food, also affect students' comfort during the adaptation process.

However, social support from peers and lecturers plays a crucial role in helping students overcome these challenges, allowing the adaptation process to proceed gradually and constructively.

“I follow the guidance of lecturers, religious teachers, and local friends, and try to actively participate in campus religious activities.” (NDCPA, 17 years)

“I adapt by learning from friends and participating in activities gradually.” (AR, 25 years)

These findings emphasize that social support within the campus environment is a key factor in facilitating successful religious adaptation. Respondents also reported that studying at UNISDA encouraged positive changes in how they understand and practice religion.

These changes include increased openness to diverse perspectives within Islam, a calmer attitude, and the ability to respect differences of opinion without abandoning fundamental beliefs. Students also reported improved focus on knowledge, ethics, and religious behavior, contributing to the development of a more reflective and mature religious attitude.

This transformation has a positive impact on both spiritual and academic life, including increased discipline in performing religious practices, stronger motivation to deepen religious knowledge, and more focused learning orientation.

Although some students reported no significant changes due to maintaining their primary fiqh understanding, overall findings indicate that the Islamic educational environment at UNISDA plays an important role in shaping a more moderate, adaptive, and constructive religious attitude.

“Yes. I have learned to respect differences of opinion in Islam while maintaining my beliefs.” (MM, 20 years)

“I better understand religious teachings and have become more disciplined in practicing them. This change has had a very positive impact and motivates me to learn more.” (NDCPA, 27 years)

It can be concluded that some students have experienced value conflicts, particularly related to differences in fiqh perspectives and interpretations of religious practices. However, these conflicts generally do not escalate into open confrontation.

Students tend to address them through calm, dialogical, and reflective approaches, such as engaging in respectful discussions, increasing communication, maintaining openness, and prioritizing the principles of *tabayyun* (verification) and mutual respect. Some students also choose to strengthen their personal understanding through independent learning and repeated study of religious materials.

These findings indicate that the ability to manage differences in a mature and moderate manner is a crucial factor in maintaining religious harmony within the campus environment.

## **Discussion**

The findings indicate that the majority of international students studying at Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA) are scholarship recipients from their home countries, suggesting that financial support plays a significant role in encouraging international educational mobility. The availability of scholarships and funding assistance is a key factor influencing international students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The reputation of UNISDA as an Islamic higher education institution that integrates academic learning with Islamic values also serves as a major attraction for international students, particularly those from Muslim backgrounds. Institutional reputation, along with alignment in cultural and ideological values, has a significant influence on international students' study preferences (Aziz et al., 2025). The combination of scholarship support and institutional identity as an university that integrates academic excellence with Islamic value formation positions UNISDA strategically in attracting international students amid global competition in higher education.

The adaptation of religious patterns among international students in the pesantren-based Islamic educational environment at UNISDA Lamongan constitutes a complex socio-religious process. The findings show that this adaptation does not occur instantly

but rather progresses through continuous and dynamic stages, influenced by students' religious backgrounds and the characteristics of the pesantren environment, which is rich in values, distinctive Indonesian Islamic practices, and traditions. Religious adaptation is not merely a ritual adjustment but involves transformation in ways of thinking, attitudes, and interactions within a new religious context, particularly in a pesantren-based educational setting (Imam Bukhori & Yaqub Cikusin, 2023).

UNISDA maintains a structured religious life system, ranging from congregational worship practices, routine religious activities, interreligious ceremonial events, to social cultures infused with traditional Islamic values. This condition requires international students to adapt not only academically but also religiously and culturally. These findings are consistent with Suhartini (2016), who emphasizes that pesantren function as spaces for the comprehensive internalization of Islamic values, encompassing cognitive, affective, and practical aspects of daily life. International students entering the pesantren environment at UNISDA are thus engaged in a process of lived religion, rather than merely acquiring religious knowledge.

The findings further reveal that international students at UNISDA come from diverse religious backgrounds, both in terms of theological perspectives and the intensity of religious practices. Some students come from Salafi traditions, emphasizing the purification of Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, while others come from Muslim environments with more contextual or less intensive religious practices. This diversity becomes a primary factor influencing the dynamics of religious adaptation. This finding supports Maftuh (2024), who states that differences in cultural and religious backgrounds are a major trigger of culture shock among international students in Indonesia.

Differences in religious practices—particularly those associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) traditions, such as qunut in the Fajr prayer, tahlilan, yasin recitation, grave visitation, and the structured and collective nature of religious activities—constitute initial challenges for international students. For students from Salafi backgrounds or environments with more individual religious practices, these traditions are perceived as new experiences that require reinterpretation, whether to be practiced or simply

tolerated. However, these differences are not always perceived as theological conflicts, but rather as contextual and cultural variations in religious expression. This reflects students' reflective capacity in understanding and responding to intra-Islamic diversity in a more mature manner.

These findings are in line with Nadeem (2022), who argues that religiosity can function as an adaptive resource in cross-cultural communication. The religious commitment of international students actually encourages them to be more open, patient, and reflective in responding to differences in religious practices. Religiosity does not become a source of resistance but rather serves as an ethical foundation for building mutual respect and intra-religious tolerance (Fuad & Masuwd, 2023). The adaptation of religious patterns among international students at UNISDA does not lead to homogenization of understanding but instead strengthens moderate and inclusive attitudes.

Adaptation challenges arise not only in linguistic aspects but also in cultural dimensions. Limited proficiency in the Indonesian language becomes an initial barrier for international students in understanding religious lectures, participating in discussions, and building social relationships with local students and lecturers. Differences in daily cultural practices, including dietary habits and social customs, also affect students' comfort during the early stages of adaptation. These findings are consistent with Mareza & Nugroho (2017), who highlight that international and minority students often face dual challenges: academic adaptation and socio-cultural adaptation simultaneously.

The findings emphasize that social support within the campus environment plays a crucial role in facilitating successful religious adaptation among international students. Not only peers, but also lecturers and religious teachers (ustadz) at UNISDA act as key facilitators who help students understand local religious practices, provide dialogical explanations, and create safe spaces for discussion and inquiry. This aligns with the concept of social support in cross-cultural adaptation, which underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships in reducing adaptation stress and accelerating adjustment processes (Ng et al., 2017).

The adaptation process experienced by international students not only influences their attitudes but also shapes their religious patterns. The findings indicate increased openness toward differences in fiqh perspectives, a calmer attitude in dealing with diverse religious practices, and the ability to maintain personal beliefs without adopting exclusive attitudes. This transformation demonstrates that the pesantren-based Islamic educational environment not only transmits traditions but also fosters critical and reflective religious awareness. This is consistent with Muttaqin (2025), who argues that modern pesantren play a strategic role in developing adaptive models of Islamic education without losing their traditional identity.

Most students reported no significant changes in their core fiqh orientation; however, they experienced development in ethical aspects of religiosity, such as discipline in worship, respect for scholarly authority, religious tolerance, and awareness of the importance of social harmony. Religious adaptation does not necessarily imply theological change but may involve the deepening of attitudes and the strengthening of Islamic moral values. UNISDA functions as a practical space for learning religious moderation, where international students learn to manage differences dialogically, constructively, and tolerantly. The integration of religious moderation values into curriculum and learning practices has been shown to enhance mutual respect and openness to diversity (Nur 'Azah & Muh Ibnu Sholeh, 2025).

The findings also indicate that potential religious value conflicts arising from differences in practices and fiqh interpretations are generally managed maturely and do not escalate into open conflict. International students tend to adopt dialogical adaptation strategies, such as engaging in respectful discussions, practicing *tabayyun* (verification), and strengthening personal understanding through learning, discussion, and reflection. This strategy reflects the internalization of Islamic ethical values emphasizing deliberation (*musyawarah*), tolerance, and respect for differences.

Thus, the adaptation of religious patterns at UNISDA contributes to the creation of religious harmony within a multicultural campus environment. Religious moderation plays a significant role in enhancing social harmony and inter-religious tolerance among students (Gule, 2025). In conclusion, the adaptation of religious patterns among

international students in pesantren-based Islamic higher education at UNISDA is the result of the interaction between students' religious backgrounds, the institutional culture of pesantren, fiqh understanding, and campus social support. The pesantren environment serves not only as a space for transmitting Islamic values but also as a medium for shaping moderate, adaptive, and constructive religious attitudes.

#### **D. Conclusion**

International students enter Universitas Islam Darul Ulum (UNISDA) with diverse religious backgrounds, both in terms of patterns of understanding and the intensity of religious practices, resulting in a dynamic adaptation process. Differences in religious traditions and practices—particularly the dominance of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) traditions—as well as linguistic and cultural differences, constitute initial challenges that may lead to culture shock.

However, social support from peers, lecturers, and the campus environment plays a crucial role in helping students overcome these challenges and gradually adjust. The learning experience at UNISDA fosters positive transformations in how students understand and practice religious teachings, as reflected in increased openness to diverse Islamic perspectives, more calm and reflective attitudes, and the ability to respect differences of opinion without abandoning their fundamental beliefs.

These changes have a positive impact on students' spiritual and academic lives, including improved discipline in worship, stronger motivation to deepen religious knowledge, and a more focused learning orientation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that UNISDA develop more structured religious adaptation support programs, including strengthening linguistic and cultural assistance, in order to facilitate the adaptation process of international students more effectively and sustainably.

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