

Religious Challenges and Guidance for Dayak Muslim Converts in the Indonesia–Malaysia Border Region

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Abstract: Religious conversion in border areas often triggers complex identity negotiations and social tension, particularly for indigenous communities like the Dayak people. In Jagoi Village, located at the Indonesia–Malaysia border, many Dayak individuals who convert to Islam face cultural, social, and spiritual challenges due to their minority status and the persistence of traditional customs. This study aims to identify the religious issues encountered by Dayak Muslim converts and evaluate the strategies of religious guidance based on religious moderation. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations involving religious counselors and local converts. The findings reveal four major problems: limited Islamic knowledge, minimal religious mentoring, poor access to digital Islamic resources, and a lack of understanding of religious moderation. This research contributes to the discourse on minority religious identity and offers policy recommendations for inclusive, culturally sensitive religious mentoring. It also supports the design of empowerment models for Muslim converts in border areas, which can serve as a reference for interreligious engagement and social integration efforts in Southeast Asia's plural societies.

Keywords: Dayak Muslim Converts; Religious Syncretism; Religious Moderation; Borderland Communities; Contextual Islamic Guidance

1. Introduction

The dynamics of religious conversion in Indonesia's border regions represent an overlooked yet urgent issue, especially among indigenous communities such as the Dayak. In Jagoi Village, located in Bengkayang Regency, West Kalimantan—an area bordering Malaysia—many members of the Dayak ethnic group have converted to Islam but continue to experience religious and cultural marginalization (Dove, 2006; Fahmi & Muhyiddin, 2023; König, 2016). Unlike earlier periods when conversion to Islam often meant assimilation into Malay identity, contemporary Dayak Muslim converts maintain their ethnic identity while adopting a new faith. This dual identity situates them at



the intersection of two cultural systems, creating tensions in religious practice, social inclusion, and identity negotiation (Paoliello, 2019; Yuswanto et al., 2023). Their minority status is exacerbated by limited religious infrastructure, minimal state support, and enduring communal expectations to uphold traditional Dayak customs. Furthermore, border areas like Jagoi are often classified as underdeveloped, isolated, and peripheral (3T areas), leading to systemic neglect in education, religious services, and economic opportunity (Koloszko-Chomentowska & Sieczko, 2018; Kupriyanov et al., 2018). This structural vulnerability positions Dayak Muslim converts as doubly marginalized—ethnically and religiously—making them highly susceptible to exclusion both from their communities and the broader Muslim society.

Numerous studies have discussed religious conversion and Islamic preaching in border or minority contexts. Yet, only a few have explored how religious identity is constructed, contested, and reinforced in borderland settings involving indigenous converts. For instance, Madjid et al. (2020) investigated Islamic guidance for Akit converts in Siak, finding that personal and communal support systems are essential in sustaining new religious commitments (Madjid et al., 2020). Similarly, Aulia and Arifin (2023) emphasized the importance of religious moderation in fostering interreligious harmony in higher education institutions (Aulia & Arifin, 2023). In the context of border regions, Nurjannah and Lani (2020) documented the tendency of religious formalism among residents of the Indonesia–Papua New Guinea border (Nurjannah & Haryani, 2020). However, little attention has been paid to the lived religious dialectics—the tension and negotiation between old beliefs, new doctrines, and communal expectations—among Dayak Muslim converts specifically. Previous literature often fails to address the internal identity struggles and the external limitations of *mualaf* in border zones, particularly regarding the interplay between local culture, religious identity, and state-supported religious mentoring. This study thus fills a crucial gap by focusing on Dayak Muslim converts at the Indonesia–Malaysia border and their engagement with religious guidance amid sociocultural complexities.

This study aims to explore the religious dialectics experienced by Dayak Muslim converts in Jagoi Village and examine how religious mentoring programs—especially those rooted in the concept of religious moderation—address or fail to address their unique needs. Two interrelated objectives drive the research. First, it seeks to identify the key religious challenges Dayak Muslim converts face, including their limited access to religious knowledge, weak guidance infrastructure, and struggle to reconcile Islamic values with Dayak cultural practices. Second, the study evaluates the effectiveness and limitations of the current religious mentoring models in promoting inclusive Islamic understanding, empowering converts, and supporting peaceful coexistence within a multi-religious environment. The research further considers how government policies, religious counselors, and local community structures interact in shaping the religious development of these converts. In doing so, it aims to offer evidence-based policy recommendations for strengthening religious guidance for *mualaf* in border regions, considering not only religious orthodoxy but also cultural sustainability and social resilience.

This research operates under the assumption that religious conversion among the Dayak in border areas is not merely a theological shift but a complex process of socio-cultural negotiation that requires continuous support. It argues that religious mentoring—if designed with sensitivity to local culture and the principle of religious moderation—can play a transformative role in sustaining converts' Islamic faith while respecting their indigenous identity. Religious guidance may become

alienating, ineffective, or even counterproductive without such tailored interventions, reinforcing marginalization rather than empowerment. The study hypothesizes that the absence of culturally adapted and sustainable religious mentoring programs contributes significantly to Dayak Muslim converts' limited religious literacy and spiritual resilience. Furthermore, it posits that integrating economic empowerment, media literacy, and interfaith engagement into religious guidance can enhance the effectiveness of da'wah in plural, peripheral communities. This framework positions the research within the intersection of identity politics, religious sociology, and border studies, offering a multidimensional approach to understanding conversion beyond doctrinal affiliation alone(Amin, 2020).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Religious Conversion and Identity Transformation

Religious conversion refers to a fundamental transformation in one's religious affiliation, often accompanied by a shift in belief systems, rituals, and communal belonging. It is not merely a theological decision but a profound identity negotiation, especially in societies where religion intersects with ethnicity, culture, and political structures(Ayten et al., 2019). In the Southeast Asian context, religious conversion frequently serves as a mechanism for social mobility, inclusion, or even protection(Milner, 2023). For indigenous groups such as the Dayak, converting to Islam has historically entailed cultural assimilation into the Malay identity, thereby blurring the boundary between religious and ethnic belonging(Duile, 2017; Zainuri, 2018). However, contemporary trends show a reverse tendency: many Dayak Muslims choose to retain their indigenous identity while practicing a new faith, resulting in hybrid or syncretic forms of religiosity. This opens space for what scholars call "multiple belonging"(Großmann, 2019; Tsao, 2016), where individuals navigate between conflicting systems of belief and tradition.

Scholars have categorized religious conversion into several types based on motivation and social context: intellectual, mystical, social, coercive, and apostatic(Isaeva, 2019). In the case of Dayak converts, the most dominant forms are social conversion, usually through marriage, and intellectual conversion, where individuals seek spiritual answers outside their inherited belief systems(Dariyo, 2021). Conversion through marriage often results in formal religious affiliation but with minimal doctrinal knowledge, creating what some scholars call "shallow conversion."(Dariyo, 2021). On the other hand, intellectual conversion—although rarer—can result in deeper internalization of new religious values. Studies on the Akit community in Siak(Madjid et al., 2020) and the Tenggerese Muslims in East Java(Ramadhanu & Widiastuti, 2017) reveal similar patterns: religious guidance must be responsive not only to spiritual needs but also to the convert's cultural and economic context. Hence, conversion is not a single event but an ongoing process of adaptation and negotiation.

2.2. Religious Moderation in Multicultural Societies

Religious moderation is a paradigm that promotes a balanced, tolerant, and contextual approach to religious life. It emphasizes inclusivity, peaceful coexistence, and rejection of extremism and religious exclusivism(Bachrong & Karim, 2022). In plural societies, religious moderation is a framework to manage diversity while upholding individual faith commitments. It encourages dialogue, mutual respect, and active participation in civic life regardless of religious differences. In

Indonesia, religious moderation is officially promoted through national policy and embedded in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This concept becomes particularly crucial in border areas like West Kalimantan, where ethnic and religious heterogeneity frequently intersect with issues of national integration and minority protection. For Dayak Muslim converts, religious moderation is not merely a theoretical ideal but a survival strategy that enables them to maintain harmonious relationships with both non-Muslim relatives and mainstream Muslim communities.

There are at least three dimensions of religious moderation identified in the scientific literature: theological moderation (balance in interpreting religious texts), socio-cultural moderation (accommodation of local customs), and civic moderation (active contribution to peace and diversity)(Halim et al., 2021; Haris et al., 2023). In border communities such as Jagoi Village, socio-cultural moderation predominates, as converts have to negotiate between Islamic doctrine and Dayak traditions. A study by Halim et al. (2021) revealed that digital religious platforms that promote moderate teachings can greatly help converts to engage with Islam without feeling alienated from their cultural roots(Halim et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Haris et al. (2023) show how religious moderation education in Hindu-majority areas promotes interreligious harmony through local wisdom(Haris et al., 2023). These cases show that religious moderation is most effective when adapted and localized, aligning religious practices with everyday socio-cultural realities. For Dayak converts, this means reconciling Islamic worship with traditional rituals and family obligations without causing conflict or alienation.

2.3. Religious Guidance and Empowerment of Muslim Converts

Religious guidance refers to structured mentoring activities designed to deepen one's understanding and practice of religion. For converts, this includes doctrinal instruction (aqidah, fiqh, worship) as well as psychosocial support to help them through the transition. In the context of indigenous minorities, religious guidance must be more than a transmission of orthodoxy—it must serve as an adaptive bridge that allows converts to internalize the teachings of Islam while maintaining their cultural dignity. This is in line with the broader idea of religious empowerment, which emphasizes autonomy, spiritual resilience, and community participation. Without inclusive and localized religious mentoring, converts often experience religious dissonance and disengagement, which can lead to identity crises or passive affiliations. Therefore, religious guidance must be content-rich and context-sensitive. Research conducted by Abidin et al. shows that religious guidance has a significant influence on worship practices in madrasas, highlighting the importance of appropriate structures and approaches in religious education(Haris et al., 2023). In a similar context, research by Upenieks and Ellison confirms that well-structured religious guidance can reduce psychological problems and improve an individual's connection to their religious community, which is especially useful for converts in their adjustment process(Halim et al., 2021). This shows that her mentors not only pass on religious information but also help individuals grapple with the identity challenges they face, allowing them to move towards wholesome integration.

Religious guidance programs in Indonesia can be categorized into three types: institutional guidance (through mosques, TPQ, or KUA), community-based guidance (through local religious leaders), and multidimensional guidance that includes economic and psychosocial components(Haris et al., 2023). The case of the Tengger convert in Argosari Village shows how integrating economic empowerment with religious guidance can strengthen faith and prevent

religious abandonment. BMH's LAZNAS initiative, which offers livestock substitution, entrepreneurial support, and religious education, has yielded measurable results in increasing the religiosity and economic stability of converts (Haris et al., 2023). On the other hand, in Jagoi Village, the limited availability of trained counselors and logistical challenges hinder similar progress (Halim et al., 2021). This comparison shows that practical religious guidance must be doctrinally sound, socially relevant, economically supportive, and adapted to the realities of converts living in remote areas. In research, several studies have shown that holistic religious guidance can facilitate converts' adaptation to their new environment, ensuring they receive adequate support in both spiritual and economic aspects, ultimately contributing to a stronger religious identity (Rasmitadila et al., 2023). When religious guidance does not consider social and economic contexts, the results often lead to feelings of alienation (Kitching et al., 2024). This emphasizes the importance of a contextual approach in religious guidance programs in Indonesia, which not only provides doctrinal instruction but also pays attention to various aspects of the lives of converts (Lopez-Perry, 2020).

3. Methods

3.1 Material Object

The material object of this study is the lived religious experience of Dayak Muslim converts residing in Jagoi Village, Bengkayang Regency, located at the Indonesia–Malaysia border. The study focuses on the dialectics between Islamic teachings and Dayak cultural practices and the modes of religious guidance provided to the converts. The research explores how religious mentoring addresses the unique needs of this minority group within a multicultural and peripheral setting.

3.2 Research Design

This research employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. The case study method allows for in-depth investigation of a specific community—in this case, Dayak Muslim converts in a border village—while considering their historical, cultural, and social contexts. The design enables the researcher to explore complex religious phenomena holistically, particularly the intersection of conversion, identity, and religious guidance within an ethnically plural society.

3.3 Data Sources (Participants)

The primary data sources included 30 Dayak Muslim converts, both male and female, residing in Jagoi Village. Additional informants included religious counselors from the local Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), mosque leaders, and community figures. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diverse representation in age, conversion motivation, religious knowledge, and involvement in religious mentoring activities.

3.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participatory observation during religious mentoring sessions. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured guides to allow flexibility and depth. FGDs were held with Dayak converts to capture collective experiences and perceptions. Field observations were also conducted in religious sites,

such as Shirotul Jannah Mosque and Quranic study centers, to document mentoring practices and participation levels.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed thematic analysis procedures. Interview transcripts, field notes, and FGD recordings were transcribed, coded, and categorized into major themes, including identity negotiation, mentoring challenges, religious literacy, and sociocultural integration. Thematic coding enabled the identification of recurring patterns and contradictions, which were then interpreted in light of religious moderation and literature on conversion and indigenous religiosity. Triangulation was applied to ensure data validity..

4. Result

4.1 The Syncretic Practices and Cultural Continuity of Dayak Muslim Converts

Field findings from Jagoi Babang Village show that Dayak converts continue to engage in traditional cultural rituals and practices, reflecting a syncretic religious life. Despite having formally converted to Islam, many still participate in customary discussions, traditional wedding ceremonies, agricultural rituals, and local conflict resolution mechanisms rooted in Dayak customary law. These practices are a way to maintain ethnic ties and respect non-Muslim family members. This suggests that conversion does not eliminate cultural heritage, but instead encourages hybrid forms of religious expression (Haris et al., 2023). This syncretic adaptation is in line with the previous pattern of Islamic spread in the region, which accommodated indigenous beliefs since the 13th century, when the Islamization of the Tanjungpura Kingdom was carried out through Arab traders (Halim et al., 2021).

In addition, research by Naim et al. Rasmitadila et al. (2023) reinforce that the integration between religious practices and local cultural values is an important factor in understanding the conversion process in a multicultural society, such as in Jagoi Babang. Converts were able to maintain their original identity while adopting new elements of Islam, demonstrating that acceptance of new religions is often combined with existing traditions. The importance of understanding this collaboration between religions and cultures was also revealed in a study by Hamidy (Kitching et al., 2024), which showed that the educational component of religious moderation can play a role in facilitating the strengthening of harmonious religious identity in the context of a diverse Indonesian society.

The sustainability of these traditions among Dayak converts highlights the cultural resilience shaped by historical memory and contemporary negotiations. In interviews, some converts stated that participation in Dayak rituals, such as harvest celebrations or family ancestral ceremonies, did not contradict their faith, but rather affirmed loyalty to the family and community. It reflects a practical theology rooted in relational ethics and a sense of community. Hermansyah (Haris et al., 2023) explained that the Islamization process in Kalimantan has always been dialogical, prioritizing gradual adaptation rather than confrontation. As a result, the religious identity of Dayak Muslims is not monolithic but layered with cultural codes and local symbols that retain ancestral meanings.

A study by Nazir underlines that interactions between religion and culture often arise in the form of mutually beneficial acculturation, suggesting that converts can integrate traditional elements

into their religious practices(Halim et al., 2021). It also reflects a dialogical perspective on faith, where the dialogue between local traditions and Islamic teachings creates space for a more inclusive acceptance of religiosity. Furthermore, research by Kuntarto(Rasmitadila et al., 2023) shows that an effective religious guidance model must be able to reflect local values without losing the essence of Islamic teachings, supporting the revival of cultural identity among converts. In addition, a study by Agus and Firdaus(Kitching et al., 2024) emphasizes the importance of acknowledging local wisdom in religious practice, which can strengthen social cohesion and reduce identity conflicts in multicultural communities. By acknowledging and appreciating the contributions of existing cultures, the process of Islamization can be seen not as a shift, but as a dialogue that enriches the spiritual life of the people.

Hybridity among Dayak converts is reinforced by social and spatial marginalization in the 3T (disadvantaged, outermost, and border) regions, which forces them to depend on customs to live a social life. They did not adopt Islam purely but rather formed a syncretic religiosity that united Islamic values with local cosmology(Dawi et al., 2022; Halim et al., 2021). The government's religious moderation program (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020) supports this integration, although its implementation is limited. Conflict resolution based on local customs and rituals shows an adaptive Islam rooted in traditional epistemology. The principle of restorative justice in customary law contributes to culturally appropriate conflict resolution(Dawi et al., 2022). In addition, the history of dialogue between local religions and beliefs shows hybridization in response to change(Rasmitadila et al., 2023)(Revaldi et al., 2024). Local religious education strengthens community resilience(Halim et al., 2021).

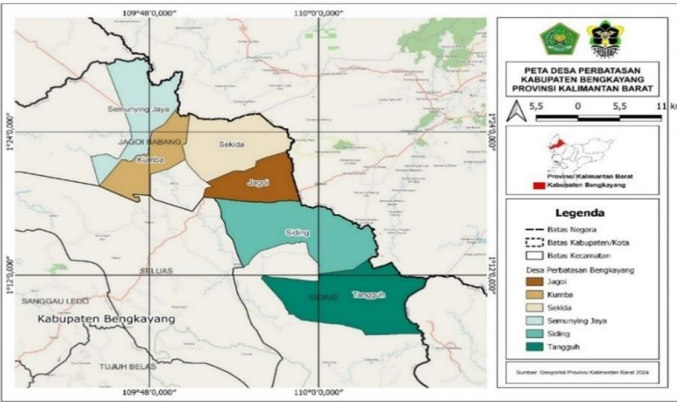


Figure 1: Border Village Map Between Countries in Bengkayang Regency
(Source: Processed Research Data, May 2024)

4.2 Deficiencies in Religious Knowledge and Support Infrastructure

The findings reveal that Dayak Muslim converts face major disparities in religious education and structural support due to educational and geographic limitations. For example, in Jagoi Village (51.69 km²), only one Islamic counselor serves six villages, severely restricting access to religious mentoring(Faoziyah, 2022). As a result, many rely on community-based rituals, limiting their understanding of Islam and hindering the development of religious resilience. While the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs promotes religious moderation through culturally integrated

education(Diaków & Goforth, 2021), implementation remains limited and fails to address the specific needs of Dayak converts(Tahara, 2023). Consequently, these communities often form hybrid faith identities by incorporating indigenous practices, which reflects a localized approach to religiosity (Mhaka-Mutepfa & Maundeni, 2019). Strengthening community-based mentoring and tailoring religious education to local contexts are crucial to fostering a resilient Muslim identity and bridging the support gaps(Mythen, 2012).

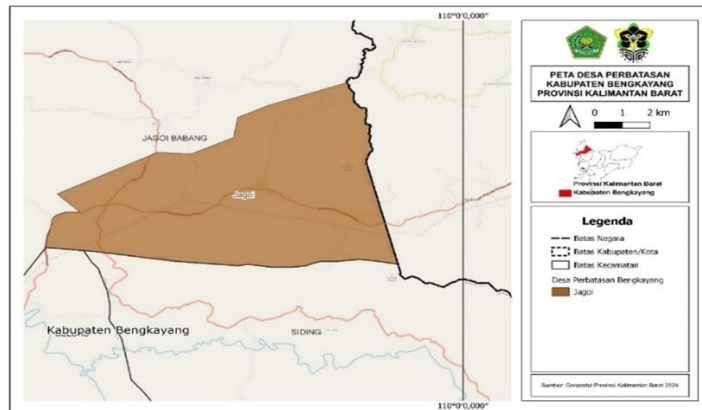


Figure 2: Map of Jagoi Village, the Border Between Countries in Bengkayang Regency
(Source: Processed Research Data, May 2024)

Dayak Muslim converts face compounded challenges in religious education due to limited access to technology and poor internet infrastructure in remote areas like Jagoi Babang District(Faoziyah, 2022). Many are unfamiliar with digital tools such as smartphones, Islamic learning apps, or online sermons, making independent religious learning difficult. As Mubarok (2000) argues, effective religious guidance must align with the community's social and technological realities. Without media literacy, converts often rely on traditional preaching, which may not address contemporary issues or pluralistic dynamics(Diaków & Goforth, 2021). This creates gaps in their ability to critically engage with Islamic teachings and modern societal challenges. Traditional methods, while culturally rooted, may lack the relevance and adaptability needed in a changing world. Therefore, improving digital literacy and access to online religious resources—while remaining sensitive to local culture—is essential for strengthening religious identity and fostering spiritual growth among Dayak Muslim converts(Tahara, 2023).

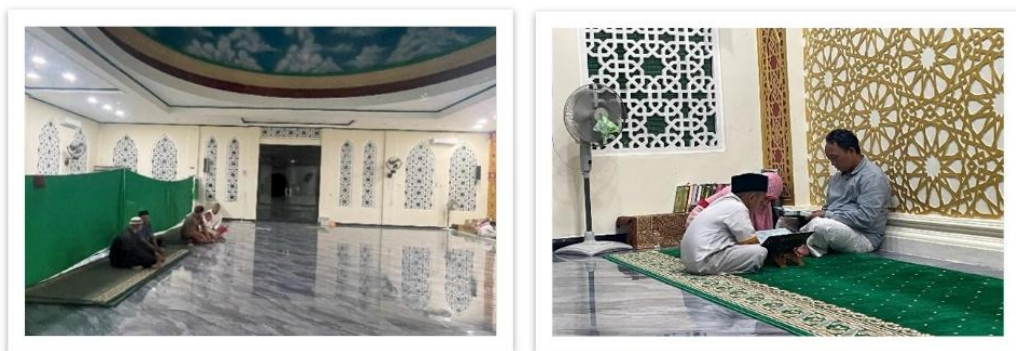


Figure 3: Religious Activities in Jagoi Village, Bengkayang Regency

(Source: Processed Research Data, May 2024)

Dayak Muslim converts often lack understanding of religious moderation due to gaps in religious education and limited exposure to national frameworks like the RPJMN 2020–2024, which promotes harmony and cultural accommodation(Adhikari et al., 2023). In remote areas, implementation of these policies is weak, and many converts equate Islam mainly with ritual acts, missing its broader ethical dimensions. The absence of integrated education—combining theology, civic values, and cultural literacy—risks fostering exclusivism or religious apathy(Syafruddin & Permatasari, 2023). Rural communities also face barriers in accessing media and quality education, deepening the knowledge gap(Omar et al., 2023). This underscores the need for collaboration among religious, governmental, and civil society actors to introduce religious moderation at the grassroots level(Hidajah & Astutik, 2023). Community-based programs that emphasize civic engagement, cross-cultural dialogue, and the ethical teachings of Islam are vital to nurturing a balanced and resilient faith identity in pluralistic settings(Mao et al., 2023).

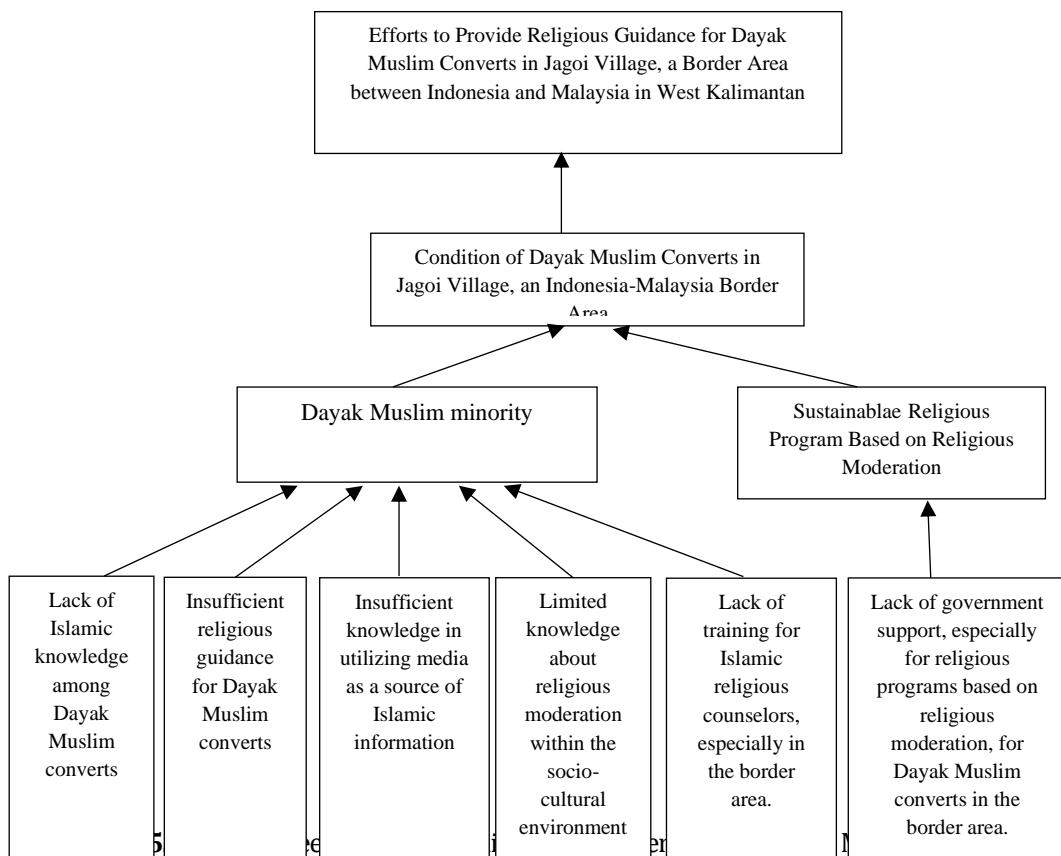
4.3 Strategic Planning for Religious Empowerment

To address the complex challenges faced by Dayak Muslim converts, a comprehensive strategy centered on religious moderation has been proposed, emphasizing collaboration between converts and Islamic counselors. This approach begins with targeted training modules to strengthen foundational Islamic knowledge in theology, rituals, and ethics, bridging current educational gaps(Aprilianti, 2024). In parallel, digital literacy training is essential to empower converts to access Islamic learning tools and engage in self-directed study. Though not explicitly explored in existing studies, digital literacy is widely acknowledged as crucial for educational empowerment. The Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) is urged to integrate these modules into its mentoring framework, especially in border regions with limited resources(Darmawani et al., 2021). Incorporating Islamic psychological principles—such as stress management and resilience—further equips converts to navigate pluralistic environments(Aprilianti, 2024). Community-based engagement and peer learning platforms will enrich this process, fostering solidarity and cultural integration. Overall, this holistic strategy enhances knowledge, strengthens identity, and builds inclusive communities.



Figure 4: Shirothul Jannah Mosque in Jagoi Village, Jagoi Babakng Sub-District, Bengkayang Regency
(Source: Processed Data, Mei 2024)

To address the shortage of religious counselors among Dayak Muslim converts, a key strategy involves training local assistant counselors from within the convert community. Their cultural familiarity enables more relatable and context-sensitive mentoring (Abdullah et al., 2022). Training can be delivered through modular workshops, culminating in certification that empowers them to assist formally. Partnerships with NGOs and Islamic philanthropic organizations—such as LAZNAS BMH—can enhance program implementation, drawing on proven empowerment models for converts in other regions ((Khan, 2021)). The program must also adopt a gender-sensitive approach, as many converts are women. Enhancing women's religious literacy and economic skills supports household well-being and deepens faith commitment. Peer support tailored to cultural contexts has been shown to boost participation and engagement (Shakya et al., 2017). Including women in leadership roles strengthens community networks and broadens the mentoring framework, fostering inclusivity and shared understanding (Carandang et al., 2019). This approach promotes sustainability and resilience within the community.



The successful empowerment of Dayak Muslim converts relies on coordinated efforts among local government, religious institutions, community leaders, and regional zakat bodies to implement comprehensive mentoring programs (Ilhami, 2023; Talaallayna & Winarti, 2024). Aligning these efforts with RPJMN 2020–2024 objectives—particularly religious moderation and social harmony—requires participatory planning and issue mapping tailored to local contexts (Hanif et al., 2022). Expanding community-based religious education centers like TPQ, with added modules on tolerance,

interfaith dialogue, and peaceful coexistence, is vital for fostering mutual respect in diverse settings(Pambudi et al, 2021). This integrated strategy not only enhances converts' religious understanding but also positions them as agents of peace along the Indonesia–Malaysia border. Building such a community-oriented framework is essential for sustaining religious moderation and countering exclusivist narratives(Nurdin & Muhammad, 2022), ultimately promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society(Marlina, 2023).

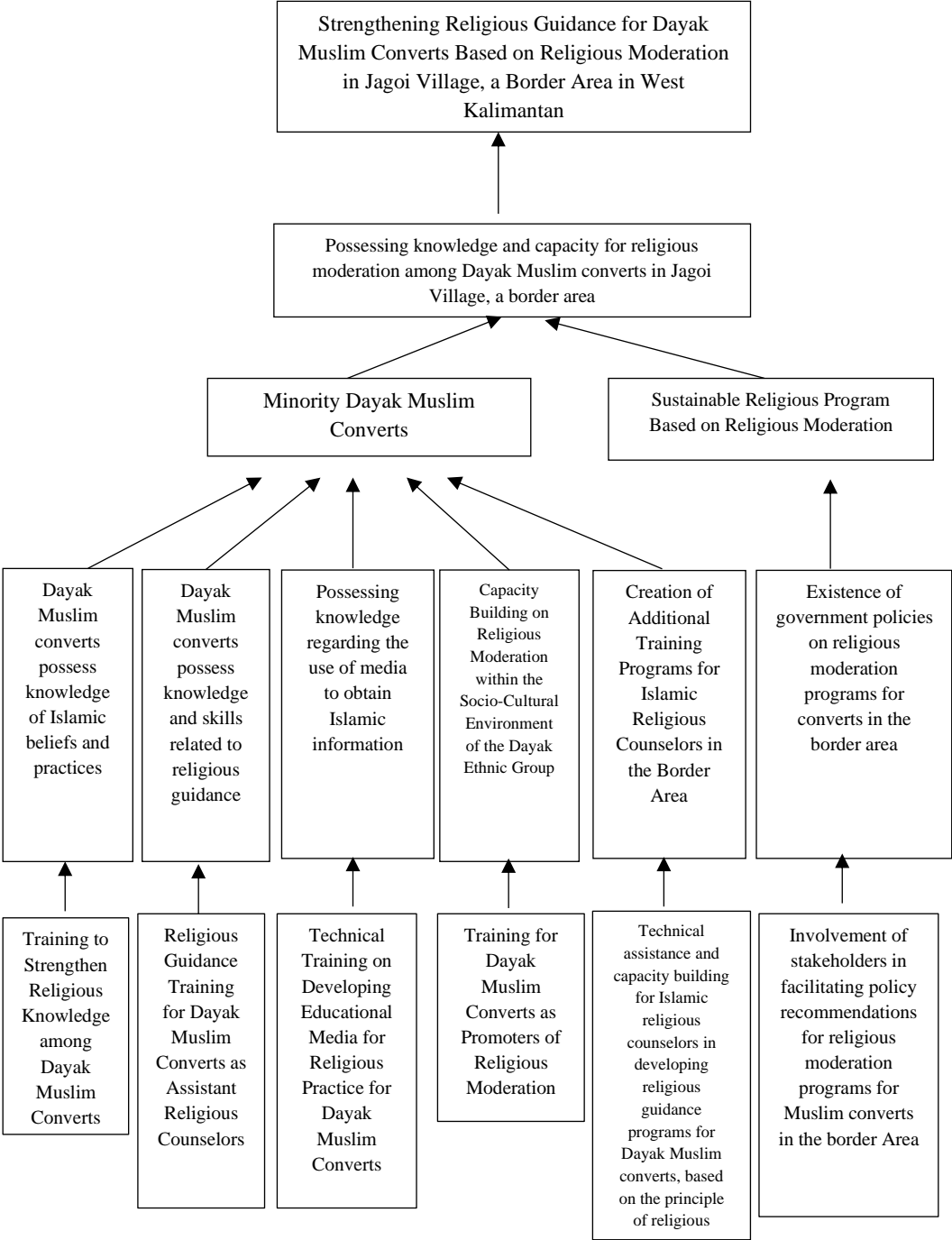


Figure 6. Objective Tree Analysis on Religious Empowerment Strategy

Table 1: Program Strategy Analysis Matrix

No	Issues	Intended Outcomes	Program Strategies
1	Lack of knowledge among Dayak Muslim converts about Islam	Dayak Muslim converts possess knowledge of Islamic beliefs and practices	Training to Strengthen Religious Knowledge among Dayak Muslim Converts
2	Lack of religious guidance for Dayak Muslim converts	Dayak Muslim converts possess knowledge and skills related to religious guidance	Religious Guidance Training for Dayak Muslim Converts as Assistant Religious Counselors
3	Lack of understanding among Dayak converts regarding the use of media to access information about Islam.	Dayak Muslim converts possess knowledge regarding the use of media to obtain Islamic information.	Technical Training on Developing Educational Media for Religious Practice for Dayak Muslim Converts
4	Lack of knowledge about religious moderation in the socio-cultural environment	Capacity Building on Religious Moderation within the Socio-Cultural Environment of the Dayak Ethnic Group	Training for Dayak Muslim Converts as Promoters of Religious Moderation
5	Lack of training for Islamic religious counselors, especially in the border area	Islamic religious counselors in the border area are skilled in developing religious guidance programs for Dayak Muslim converts.	Technical assistance and capacity building for Islamic religious counselors in developing religious guidance programs for Dayak Muslim converts, based on the principle of religious moderation.
6	Lack of government support, particularly for religious programs based on religious moderation for Dayak Muslim converts in the border area.	Existence of government policies on religious moderation programs for Dayak Muslim converts in the border area.	Building communication and cooperation with stakeholders in facilitating policy recommendations for religious moderation programs for Muslim converts in the border area

5. Discussion

This study reveals the intricate relationship between religious conversion, cultural continuity, and socio-political marginalization among Dayak Muslim converts in Jagoi Babang, West Kalimantan.

While these converts formally embrace Islam, their religious practices remain closely tied to traditional customs—such as adat marriage, agricultural rituals, and indigenous conflict resolution—which are reinterpreted within an Islamic framework(Halim et al., 2021). However, limited religious knowledge and lack of access to structured guidance persist due to poor infrastructure, low media literacy, and minimal institutional support(Hashemi et al., 2020). Understanding of religious moderation is also low, despite high potential for empowerment through mentoring and multi-stakeholder collaboration(Sabna et al., 2024). The findings support Halim et al. (2021), who argue that Islamization in the region reflects cultural interweaving rather than cultural erasure(Halim et al., 2021). Hashemi et al. (2020) similarly stress that institutional support is essential for the integration and well-being of religious minorities(Hashemi et al., 2020). Sabna et al. (2024) emphasize that an integrative model of religious education, rooted in cultural empowerment, can enhance resilience(Sabna et al., 2024). Thus, promoting inclusive religious literacy that respects indigenous heritage is not only educationally urgent but also key to fostering harmony and social cohesion in marginalized border communities.

This study reveals that Dayak Muslim conversion is less a theological rupture and more a cultural negotiation, where syncretic religiosity bridges ancestral ties and Islamic identity. Converts creatively balance religious commitment with ethnic loyalty, confirming Geertz's view of religion as a dynamic structure of meaning in plural societies(Segal, 2012), and aligning with Hefner's (2000) "civil Islam," where identity forms through civic life and cultural engagement. The incorporation of Islamic elements into Dayak traditions—such as rituals and dispute resolution—reflects broader Indonesian religious pluralism and cultural resilience. However, due to limited institutional support in border regions, these adaptive expressions often occur in isolation, lacking theological depth or ethical grounding. Halim et al. (2021) emphasize that conversion involves retaining indigenous identity alongside Islamic beliefs(Halim et al., 2021). Similarly, Jafari and Süerdem (2012) argue that Islam, historically indigenized, often coexists with local traditions(Jafari & Süerdem, 2012). This underscores the need for inclusive strategies that respect cultural heritage while deepening theological understanding. Promoting such coexistence not only affirms identity but also enhances social cohesion, enabling Dayak Muslims to contribute meaningfully to Indonesia's multicultural fabric.

The findings suggest that the religious identity of Dayak Muslim converts is best understood through hybridity and contextual theology. Conversion here is not a binary shift from 'paganism' to 'orthodoxy' but a reorientation shaped by cultural familiarity. Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" captures this dynamic, where indigenous cosmologies and Islamic values coexist and interact. This space is shaped less by formal pedagogy and more by oral traditions and communal rituals. Limited digital literacy and structured mentorship further reinforce this localized religious expression. Thus, any intervention must respect this theological grammar and avoid imposing rigid models. As Syaikhon et al. (2023) and Tsey et al. (2003) argue, effective empowerment must be dialogical, participatory, and culturally literate(Syaikhon et al., 2023). Education and capacity-building efforts should integrate local knowledge systems and promote active community involvement(Herdiansyah & Rizki, 2021; Rizal & Hamzah, 2023). Recognizing cultural identity, as shown in indigenous empowerment programs, enhances resilience and well-being(Tahara, 2023). By blending spiritual and cultural education, such programs can strengthen Dayak Muslim religious

identity and improve their capacity to respond to social challenges, fostering empowerment through culturally rooted dialogue and mutual understanding.

A comparison between Dayak Muslim converts in Bengkayang and other indigenous Muslim communities—such as Baduy converts in Banten or Tengger Muslims in East Java—reveals shared patterns of syncretism and marginalization. Like the Tengger, who localize Islam through adat rituals led by internal leaders (Andika, 2017), Dayak Muslims rely on familial elders and peer-led practices rather than state-sanctioned clerics. However, the Dayak context is distinct due to its borderland geography, which adds layers of vulnerability, limited state presence, and cross-border religious influences from Malaysian Muslims. This spatial marginalization introduces competing narratives, complicating the development of religious identity in Jagoi Babang. Unlike urban centers where Islam is practiced more formally, Dayak Muslims display a pragmatic and culturally blended religiosity shaped by improvisation. This underscores the need for border-sensitive religious policies that acknowledge the region's unique cultural resilience and geographic challenges (Derks & Sremac, 2020; Héliot et al., 2019). The syncretic nature of Dayak Islam highlights a fluid interaction between indigenous traditions and Islamic practice. Effective religious interventions must be locally grounded and culturally attuned, avoiding top-down models that disregard lived realities (Aranha & Rampazzo, 2022; Shahar, 2016). Overall, the Dayak case emphasizes the need for context-specific, inclusive religious frameworks.

This study proposes a multilevel intervention strategy emphasizing contextual religious education, technological empowerment, and institutional collaboration to support Dayak Muslim converts. First, the Ministry of Religious Affairs should develop culturally sensitive Islamic theology and ethics modules tailored for remote, multi-ethnic communities, promoting inclusion and social cohesion (Halafoff et al., 2019). Second, building local capacity through assistant counselors from within the convert population ensures sustainability and cultural relevance—key for embedding religious education within local traditions. This should be accompanied by digital literacy training, enabling converts to access and engage with Islamic resources effectively (Quraishi et al., 2024) (Marisa & Djulia, 2022). Cross-sectoral partnerships with NGOs and zakat institutions can facilitate proven empowerment models, particularly in similar marginalized contexts (Uzun et al., 2023). Integrating religious moderation curricula into Taman Pendidikan Quran (TPQs) and local education centers can help counter exclusivism and foster critical engagement (GEZER & Karagözoğlu, 2023). Future research should address gendered aspects of conversion, exploring how Dayak women negotiate faith and public roles. A policy paper derived from these findings could guide regional authorities in aligning with RPJMN agendas for religious development in frontier areas.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that the religious identity of Dayak Muslim converts in Jagoi Babang is shaped by a dynamic interplay between Islamic faith and indigenous cultural traditions. Despite their formal conversion, many continue to uphold Dayak rituals, customs, and social values, creating a syncretic religiosity that blends Islamic teachings with ancestral heritage. The study also found significant deficiencies in religious knowledge, a lack of digital media literacy, and inadequate support from religious counselors due to geographic remoteness. Furthermore, religious moderation—part of

Indonesia's national policy—has not been sufficiently internalized among converts, indicating a gap between policy and grassroots implementation. These findings highlight the unique religious experience of borderland communities, where conversion does not equate to cultural erasure but rather a reconfiguration of faith through lived, local expressions.

This research contributes to the growing body of scholarship on religious hybridity, conversion, and borderland Islam by providing an in-depth case study from an underrepresented region. It supports theoretical frameworks on contextual theology and religious pluralism by illustrating how Islam can be indigenized without losing its core teachings. The findings affirm existing scholarship, such as Homi Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity and Clifford Geertz's analysis of religion as a system of meaning, while offering fresh empirical insights from Kalimantan's interior. The study also informs policy discussions on religious moderation, highlighting the need for inclusive, culturally rooted religious education models in remote and plural settings. It bridges anthropology, theology, and development studies, suggesting that religious empowerment should be dialogical, gender-sensitive, and integrated with socio-economic frameworks—especially in geopolitically sensitive zones like border regions.

Future research should explore the gendered dimensions of religious conversion among Dayak women, who form the majority of new Muslim converts in Jagoi Babang. Investigating their roles in family, religious education, and community leadership will offer a deeper understanding of agency and empowerment. Additionally, longitudinal studies can be conducted to assess the long-term effectiveness of religious moderation programs and digital literacy interventions. Comparative research across border regions in Indonesia and Malaysia would enrich cross-cultural perspectives on Islamic propagation in frontier zones. It is also recommended that future studies involve participatory action research (PAR) methodologies to co-develop solutions with local communities. Such approaches can foster trust and ensure cultural compatibility in religious development programs. Finally, integrating perspectives from digital religion, migration studies, and interfaith dialogue will further enrich the interdisciplinary scope of scholarship on religious change and continuity in Southeast Asia.

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