



## Cross-Religious Enrollment of Suku Laut Students in Bintan Madrasahs

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the practice of religious moderation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 1 Bintan, located in Berakit Village, Bintan Regency, Riau Islands Province. Remarkably, this Islamic educational institution has become the school of choice for several children from the Suku Laut (Sea Tribe) community who identify as Catholic and Protestant. Employing a historical research design with a socio-cultural approach, the study follows the methodological stages of heuristic inquiry, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Data were collected through field interviews and literature review. Findings reveal that ten non-Muslim Suku Laut children are enrolled at MIN 1 Bintan. Their enrollment is influenced by three primary factors: (1) geographical proximity to their village; (2) historical continuity, as Suku Laut children have attended the madrasah since the 1990s, facilitated by proactive outreach from the school to the community's leadership; and (3) a sense of comfort and acceptance experienced by the students within the school environment. In practice, MIN 1 Bintan demonstrates four key indicators of religious moderation: a strong commitment to national values, interreligious and interethnic tolerance among students, the absence of coercion regarding religious conversion or the adoption of Islamic symbols, and a respectful attitude toward the local culture of the Suku Laut. These findings suggest that MIN 1 Bintan exemplifies inclusive Islamic education and holds potential as a model madrasah for promoting religious moderation in Indonesia.*

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### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini mengkaji moderasi beragama di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 1 Bintan di Desa Berakit, Kabupaten*

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*Bintan, Provinsi Kepulauan Riau. Madrasah tersebut menjadi pilihan anak-anak Suku Laut yang beragama Katolik dan Protestan untuk belajar. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian sejarah dengan pendekatan sosio-kultur. Metodologi penulisan mengikuti alur dalam metodologi sejarah yang meliputi tahapan heuristik, kritik, interpretasi dan historiografi. Pengumpulan data melalui wawancara lapangan dan studi kepustakaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, tahun ajaran 2024/2025 terdapat 10 anak Suku Laut non-Muslim yang bersekolah di MIN 1 Bintan. Terdapat tiga faktor utama yang menyebabkan mereka memilih MIN 1 Bintan. Pertama, faktor jarak yang relatif dekat dengan kampung mereka; kedua, faktor kesejarahan, karena sejak tahun 1990-an, anak-anak Suku Laut sudah bersekolah di MIN 1 Bintan dan pihak sekolah aktif melakukan pendekatan kepada Ketua Suku Laut untuk memfasilitasi pendidikan mereka; dan ketiga, faktor kenyamanan, di mana anak-anak Suku Laut merasa nyaman bersekolah di MIN 1 Bintan. Dalam praktiknya, terdapat empat indikator moderasi beragama yang terjaga dengan baik di sekolah ini, yaitu komitmen kebangsaan, toleransi antar sesama murid yang berbeda suku dan agama, tidak adanya paksaan untuk berpindah agama atau mengenakan atribut keislaman, serta tidak adanya kekerasan dan penghargaan terhadap budaya lokal Suku Laut. MIN 1 Bintan bisa menjadi madrasah percontohan untuk moderasi beragama di Indonesia.*

*Laut, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri, Bintan*

## Introduction

Religious education plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral and spiritual development of students in Indonesian schools, as character formation is deeply influenced by educational experiences. Over the past fifteen years, madrasas in Indonesia have undergone significant growth, both in terms of educational quality and public interest. This trend is evident not only in rural areas but also in urban centers, where middle-class Muslim families increasingly choose madrasas for their children's education. Institutions such as Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN), Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri (MTsN), and Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) have emerged as preferred schools, with their students demonstrating competitiveness comparable to those in public schools. The widespread presence of madrasas across Indonesia contributes meaningfully to national educational development and intellectual advancement. Notably, many madrasas now welcome non-Muslim students, reflecting a broader societal shift toward inclusivity (Yusqi, 2022).

The concept of religious moderation within educational institutions, particularly madrasas, has been explored extensively in academic literature. However, few studies on this topic have been published in Scopus-indexed journals. Research indicates that education serves as a vital mechanism for promoting religious moderation in Indonesia (Aflahah et al., 2023). For instance, Atmanto and Muzayanah (2020) examined interreligious tolerance at MAN Kendal, finding that 74.15% of students exhibited tolerant attitudes, although 23.58% were less tolerant. These findings underscore the importance of reinforcing tolerance education in madrasas to mitigate potential intolerance. Despite their progress, madrasas under the Ministry of Religious Affairs

continue to face challenges, including public misconceptions that they exclusively serve Muslim students. In regions such as Papua, this perception discourages non-Muslim families from enrolling their children in madrasas. In reality, several madrasas across Indonesia accept students from diverse religious backgrounds (Murtadlo, 2015).

Studies by Mustafida (2013) and Sandi (2023) further illuminate the role of madrasas in fostering religious moderation. Mustafida's research at MIN 1 Malang identified five core multicultural values, religiosity, harmony, tolerance, equality, and cooperation, embedded in school policies, curriculum and cultural practices. Sandi's study at MIN 1 Rejang Lebong highlighted the positive impact of madrasah leadership in promoting national commitment and tolerance through daily interactions.

This study diverges from previous research by focusing on the practice of religious moderation at MIN 1 Bintan, located in Bintan Regency, Riau Islands Province, near the borders of Malaysia and Singapore. At this institution, ten students from the Orang Laut (Suku Laut) community, even Catholic and three Protestant, have chosen to pursue their education. Since the 1990s, the Orang Laut community in Kampung Panglong, Berakit Village, has consistently enrolled their children at MIN 1 Bintan, despite the availability of public elementary schools in the area. Ethnic and religious differences have not deterred their educational choices, making this case particularly compelling.

To date, no scholarly research has examined religious moderation in border regions such as Bintan, especially concerning cross-religious enrollment in Islamic schools. Although MIN 1 Bintan is the oldest MIN in the Riau Islands (established in 1951) and serves a multiethnic and multireligious student body, existing discussions are limited to online media sources (Tunggul, 2024; Apriyani, 2024).

The Suku Laut is a significant indigenous group in the Riau Islands, comprising 44 communities across five districts with a total population of approximately 12,800 (Kajang Foundation, 2021). In Bintan Regency, they reside in villages such as Berakit, Air Kelubi, Numbing, Kawal Pantai, and Mapur. Panglong Village, a Suku Laut settlement, has become a popular tourist destination (Darmawan, 2024).

Despite their cultural richness, the Suku Laut community remains among the least affected by regional development. Most have relocated to the mainland, and Presidential Regulation No. 186 of 2014 officially recognizes them as part of Indonesia's Remote Indigenous Communities (KAT) (Andesta et al., 2021). While many school-age children now attend formal education, a significant number still drop out or have never enrolled due to geographic isolation and limited awareness of education's long-term benefits (Malik et al., 2018). In Berakit Village, only a small portion of the Suku Laut population is educated. Economic hardship and reliance on marine resources compel children to assist their families as fishermen, further limiting their access to schooling (Saniah, 2022; Swastiwi et al., 2024).

Despite religious diversity, the Suku Laut community exhibits strong social solidarity. Irawati (2019) found that the Orang Laut in Bintan prioritize ancestral cultural practices over religious distinctions. Religion is often viewed as a formal requirement for civic recognition, and their spiritual life blends elements of Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, and animism. This syncretic approach fosters harmony through mutual dependence and communal bonds. The quality and accessibility of madrasah education have made these institutions attractive to diverse communities. Nevertheless, research on non-Muslim students in madrasas remains scarce. Key areas such as parental motivation, student experiences, and satisfaction levels have yet to be systematically explored (Yusqi, 2022).

The Laut people in the Riau Islands have high social solidarity despite their different religions. Irawati's research (2019) shows that the life of the Bintan Orang Laut community lives by prioritizing the culture of their ancestors regardless of the

differences in religion embraced. The Suku Laut does not really understand the religion they follow. For them, religion is seen more as an administrative rule so that they can be recognized as religious citizens in Indonesia. In religious life, they tend to combine various beliefs, such as Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity, with the rituals of animism that are still preserved. Harmony in this community is maintained because of the strong sense of interdependence and solidarity between them (Irawati, 2019).

In the 2024/2025 academic year, ten Suku Laut students, seven Catholic and three Protestant, were enrolled at MIN 1 Bintan. Their decision to attend an Islamic school, despite the presence of SDN 009 Teluk Sebung in the same village, warrants further investigation. Historical accounts suggest that since the 1990s, MIN 1 Bintan has actively engaged with the Suku Laut community, including outreach efforts by school representatives to local leaders such as Bone Pasius (Pak Boncet) to encourage enrollment (Interview with Indra Wilis, June 13, 2024).

This study seeks to address the following research questions: (1) What factors influence the enrollment of non-Muslim Suku Laut children at MIN 1 Bintan?, (2) What policies has MIN 1 Bintan implemented to support religious moderation and inclusivity?, (3) How do non-Muslim Suku Laut students interact socially with their Muslim peers at MIN 1 Bintan? The objectives of this research are: to describe the background and motivations behind the enrollment of non-Muslim Suku Laut children at MIN 1 Bintan, to examine institutional policies related to religious moderation and the inclusion of non-Muslim students, and to analyze patterns of social interaction between non-Muslim and Muslim students within the madrasah environment.

This research offers several practical and scholarly benefits. First, for the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Bintan Regency and the Bintan Regency Education Office, it serves as a strategic reference for formulating educational policies targeting the Suku Laut community in Berakit Village. It also provides recommendations for empowering maritime indigenous groups across the Riau Islands Province, particularly in Bintan. For the Suku Laut community itself, the study offers insights and encouragement to prioritize children's education, recognizing it as a key pathway to social mobility and improved quality of life. Furthermore, this research contributes to the academic discourse on religious moderation within indigenous communities, particularly in educational settings involving the Suku Laut.

The focus of this study is the Suku Laut children attending MIN 1 Bintan. Historically, the Suku Laut, also known as the Sea People, held animistic beliefs prior to adopting formal religions. Over time, various Suku Laut communities across the Riau Islands have embraced religions aligned with their evolving worldviews (Rahmat, 2022). Despite religious diversity, the Suku Laut exhibit strong intergroup tolerance, with minimal conflict reported either within their community or with other ethnic groups (Arman, 2019). The Suku Laut are traditionally nomadic seafarers, residing on boats and navigating the waters of Riau Province and South Johor. Known by various names, including the Tribal People in Riau and Lingga, they played significant roles in the Srivijaya Kingdom, the Sultanate of Malacca, and the Sultanate of Johor, despite their historical association with piracy (Lapian, 2009).

Social interaction, as defined by Wildan (2023), involves reciprocal actions between individuals with shared orientation and purpose. It is not determined by physical proximity but by mutual awareness and engagement. Genuine interaction requires recognition and intentionality; passive observation or objectification does not constitute interaction. The phenomenon of non-Muslim Suku Laut children attending an Islamic madrasah is both novel and significant in the Riau Islands context. Typically, non-Muslim students enroll in public schools, while Muslim students sometimes attend Catholic institutions such as Yos Sudarso School in Batam or Santa Maria School in

Tanjungpinang. The presence of Suku Laut children at MIN 1 Bintan challenges conventional educational boundaries and offers a compelling case for examining religious moderation in practice.

## Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using historical research methods, which consist of four stages: heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. Heuristics serve as the initial and most crucial stage, as the success of this process significantly determines the quality of the final historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2014). A literature study was conducted at the Riau Islands Cultural Preservation Center in Tanjungpinang, focusing on materials related to the Suku Laut, religious moderation, social interaction, and cultural practices in the Riau Islands. Literature study is an essential component of cultural and historical research, providing a foundation for contextual understanding (Zed, 2014).

Field research was conducted in two stages. The first was carried out on June 13–14, 2024, at MIN 1 Bintan in Berakit Village, Teluk Sebong District, Bintan. The second took place on July 23–24, 2024, focusing on Suku Laut settlements in Panglong Village, Berakit. Four informants were interviewed: Franciscus Xaverius Tintin, Chairman of the Suku Laut community and alumnus of MIN 1 Bintan, whose child currently attends the school; Indra Wilis, a teacher and former head of MIN 1 Bintan; Anton Sunyoto, another teacher at the madrasa; and Risman, a current student of MIN 1 Bintan.

The source verification stage involved two categories of data: written and oral. Written sources underwent both external verification, which evaluated the authenticity of documents, and internal verification, which assessed the reliability and truthfulness of their content. For oral sources, external verification was applied in selecting eligible informants and evaluating their credibility, while internal verification was addressed by asking the same questions to multiple informants to ensure consistency.

The final stages involved data interpretation and historiography. The analysis and interpretation of both written and oral sources were used to reconstruct the narrative, while the historiographical stage synthesized the findings into a coherent account. This process ensured that the study was grounded in both documentary evidence and lived experiences, providing a balanced historical understanding of the Suku Laut's engagement with MIN 1 Bintan within the broader context of religious moderation and cultural interaction.

## Results and Discussion

### Background of Non-Muslim Suku Laut Children Attending School at MIN 1 Bintan

The Suku Laut community in Panglong Village, Berakit, began to adopt organized religious practices after settling on the mainland. Their decision to move ashore was largely motivated by access to marine resources that sustained their livelihoods. In 1962, the family of Bone Pasius Boncet migrated from Kubung Island (now part of Batam City) to this area, followed three years later by three additional families. Together, they established the foundation of the Suku Laut community in Berakit. By 2010–2011, they had constructed houses of worship, having previously traveled to neighboring villages for religious services. Catholics typically worshiped in Pengudang, while Muslims joined services in other parts of Berakit. Today, in addition to Catholicism and Islam, some residents also adhere to Protestantism (Rahmat, 2022).

Government programs providing housing assistance for the Suku Laut in Panglong Village indirectly influenced educational participation. Increased interaction with

neighboring communities, along with initiatives from the Bintan Regency government, encouraged Suku Laut children to pursue formal education, particularly through the nine-year compulsory education policy (Saniah, 2022). Nevertheless, overall educational attainment remains low. The only community member to have pursued higher education is Francis Xaverius Tintin, who completed a Diploma I (D1) program and now serves as the Chairman of the Suku Laut in Panglong Village.

As informed by one of the informants:

*"The education of children in Kampung Panglong is still low. I myself have only ever gone to college until Diploma I. Many children drop out of school. Parents are less likely to encourage their children to go to school because they are more focused on helping the family. Since childhood, children have been accustomed to making their own money, so many are lazy to go to school. In addition, school fees are also an obstacle, plus the distance from the school is quite far from where we live." (Tintin, July 23, 2024).*

Tintin acknowledged that many Suku Laut children continue to drop out of school. He identified several contributing factors: low parental motivation to prioritize education, early socialization of children into economic activities to support household income, limited financial resources, and the considerable distance between the village and schools. Reflecting on his own experience, Tintin explained that his father, Bone Pasius Boncet, encouraged him to attend MIN 1 Bintan. At that time, the madrasa actively reached out to the Suku Laut leader, urging parents to send their children to school. Since the 1990s, many families have followed this path, enrolling their children at MIN 1 Bintan despite being Catholic or Protestant. Tintin's account is corroborated by Indra Wilis, former head of MIN 1 Bintan and currently a teacher at the institution.

He recounted: "

*When I started serving at MIN 1 Bintan in 1999, there were already Suku Laut children who went to school here. As far as I remember, the children of the former Chairman of the Panglong Village Suku Laut, Bone Pasius or Boncet, also attended school at MIN 1 Bintan. Now, Boncet's grandchildren who go to school at MIN 1 Bintan." (Interview with Indra Wilis, June 13, 2024).*

Tintin recalled that when he began his service in 1999, Suku Laut children were already attending the madrasa, including the children of Bone Pasius Boncet. Today, even Boncet's grandchildren continue this tradition. According to Tintin, three factors explain why Suku Laut families prefer MIN 1 Bintan: proximity, historical continuity, and comfort. First, the madrasa is the nearest school, located 3.7 kilometers away—about 6–10 minutes by motorbike or 30–40 minutes on foot—compared to the more distant SDN 009 Teluk Sebong, situated 9.5 kilometers from the village. Second, the parents of current Suku Laut students also studied at MIN 1 Bintan, reinforcing a sense of historical continuity. Third, children feel comfortable and accepted in the madrasa environment, where they are treated equally and without discrimination despite their religious differences. This inclusive environment has fostered a generational pattern of enrollment that continues today.

In earlier years, Francis Xaverius Tintin and his sister, Meri, also attended MIN 1 Bintan. Their father, Bone Pasius Boncet, played an important role in encouraging Suku Laut children to pursue education at the madrasa. One of the main reasons the community continues to send their children to MIN 1 Bintan is the sense of comfort and equality they experience there. Despite the madrasa's Islamic identity, Suku Laut students have never faced discrimination or mistreatment. Instead, they are treated equally alongside their Muslim peers, which fosters a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

Tintin noted that the educational awareness of the Suku Laut community began to grow after others observed his own academic achievements. Having completed a

diploma program (D1) and attained proficiency in English, Tintin was able to secure employment with a non-governmental organization (NGO), which improved his economic situation. His success inspired other parents in Kampung Panglong to recognize the transformative power of education and its potential to improve their children's lives. Many Suku Laut children now aspire to follow Tintin's path, striving for success beyond the traditional livelihood of fishing at sea. Contributing further to his community, Tintin teaches English to Suku Laut children, while his wife, also from the Suku Laut, provides Catholic instruction every Sunday at the Bone Pasius Church in Kampung Panglong.

For the 2023/2024 academic year, eight Suku Laut children from Kampung Panglong were enrolled at MIN 1 Bintan. This number increased in the following school year, 2024/2025, with ten students choosing to study at the oldest madrasa in the Riau Islands Province. Below is the list of non-Muslim Suku Laut students currently enrolled at MIN 1 Bintan:

**Table 1.** Non-Muslim Students of MIN 1 Bintan Academic Year 2024/2025

No	Nama	Grade	Religion
1.	Alfonsus Marten Boncet	1	Catholic
2.	Bastian Gio Pranata	1	Catholic
3.	Sofanya Bella	1	Christian
4.	Yolita Sefilawati	2	Catholic
5.	Arison Ramadan	3	Catholic
6.	Enjel Kristi	3	Catholic
7.	Celsia	5	Christian
8.	Tresia Juwita	5	Christian
9.	Oktarafianus Samat	6	Catholic
10.	Risman	6	Catholic

Source: Administration of MIN 1 Bintan (2024)

### MIN 1 Bintan's Policy Towards Non-Muslim Suku Laut Students

MIN 1 Bintan has long been the preferred school for children of the Suku Laut community in Kampung Panglong, largely due to the school's inclusive policies. Even before the concept of religious moderation became widely promoted, MIN 1 Bintan actively practiced tolerance by directly engaging with the Suku Laut community. In the 1990s, the head of the madrasa, Mr. Musa, personally visited the Suku Laut leader, Bone Pasius Boncet, to persuade him to send his children to the school. Once Boncet agreed, other parents followed, and the tradition of enrolling Suku Laut children in MIN 1 Bintan began. At that time, the absence of a nearby elementary school in Berakit Village also made the madrasa the most practical choice, as reported by Wilis (2024).

*"In the past, around the 1990s, the Head of MIN 1 Bintan at that time, Mr. Musa, immediately met the Chairman of the Suku Laut in Panglong Village, Bone Pasius Boncet. He persuaded Boncet to send his children to school at MIN 1 Bintan. If Boncet agrees, it is likely that other parents will also follow. And yes, the invitation worked. There are starting to be children of the Suku Laut who go to school at MIN 1 Bintan. Especially at that time in Berakit Village, there was no elementary school (SD), so their choice was MIN 1 Bintan." (Interview with Indra Wilis, June 13, 2024).*

Despite its status as an Islamic educational institution, MIN 1 Bintan does not compel non-Muslim students to participate in Islamic studies. They are free to stay

inside or outside the classroom during religious lessons, and non-Muslim girls are not required to wear the hijab, though many voluntarily choose to do so in order to feel united with their peers. The absence of Catholic and Protestant teachers means that their religion grades are filled in by class teachers, while formal religious instruction is pursued outside the school. Interestingly, many Suku Laut students show great interest in Islamic lessons, with some demonstrating fluency in reciting prayers surpassing their Muslim classmates. Francis Xaverius Tintin, now a Suku Laut leader, recalled his own enthusiasm for learning Islam at MIN 1 Bintan, noting that although his parents were surprised to find a Qur'an in his room, he remained a committed Catholic while assisting other Suku Laut children in their religious learning.

*Observations in June and July 2024 revealed that all non-Muslim Suku Laut students at MIN 1 Bintan wore the hijab and some boys even wore peci. They expressed comfort in this practice, emphasizing that it did not restrict their activities. In Class I, for example, five Suku Laut students from different faiths, two Catholics, two Muslims, and one Protestant, study together without noticeable distinctions. Muslim students also regard the presence of their Suku Laut peers as natural, often sharing benches, playing sports, and participating in activities side by side.*

The school's policy reflects a commitment to equality, grounded in the principle of egalitarianism, where all students are treated equally regardless of religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. Teachers at MIN 1 Bintan play a crucial role in sustaining this environment, adopting a persuasive and dialogical approach that respects diversity. They ensure that non-Muslim students feel fully included in the learning process and encourage peer respect across differences. The madrasa leadership also supports these inclusive policies, working with the community and local government to maintain assistance for Suku Laut students, particularly through scholarships and logistical support.

*In addition to providing equal access to education, MIN 1 Bintan ensures that Suku Laut students benefit from the government's Smart Indonesia Program (PIP) scholarships, with each child receiving IDR 450,000 annually, or IDR 225,000 for new or graduating students. Given the economic vulnerability of the Suku Laut community, this financial support is critical. The madrasa also provides logistical support through transportation services. In recent years, the Bintan Regency Government has supplied an auxiliary school bus to transport children from Berakit Village, including Suku Laut students from Panglong Village. While the bus reliably carries students to school each morning, return trips are less consistent, often requiring students to walk home for 30–40 minutes. Nevertheless, the provision of this service reflects institutional concern for the accessibility of education for all students.*

*"We see that the children of the Suku Laut have a strong physique, and that is an advantage in itself. They also excel in sports, such as football and athletics." (Interview with Anton Sunyoto, July 23, 2024).*

*Teachers at MIN 1 Bintan play a central role in fostering an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. They adopt a persuasive and dialogical approach that respects religious diversity, positioning themselves not only as academic instructors but also as facilitators who nurture mutual respect among students. Through these efforts, teachers ensure that non-Muslim students are not marginalized and continue to enjoy equal access to learning opportunities.*

The practice of religious moderation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 1 Bintan demonstrates that madrasas can serve as inclusive educational institutions that embrace religious and cultural diversity. This success highlights the ability of madrasas



to foster a harmonious learning environment and uphold the values of tolerance. Several implications arise from this achievement. First, madrasas can take a more active role in multicultural education by not only emphasizing Islamic knowledge but also instilling values of nationalism and interreligious tolerance. Second, religious moderation should be systematically integrated into the curriculum, both in classroom instruction and extracurricular activities. Third, teacher development programs are essential to ensure that educators have a strong understanding of religious moderation and are able to apply it effectively in the learning process. Fourth, the model implemented at MIN 1 Bintan can be replicated in other madrasas, particularly those located in religiously and culturally diverse areas. Finally, madrasas in border regions hold a strategic position in strengthening national insight and religious moderation, making them deserving of greater attention in educational policy.

Based on these implications, several policy recommendations can be made to strengthen the implementation of religious moderation in madrasas. The Ministry of Religious Affairs could develop specific guidelines for embedding religious moderation in madrasa education, while also conducting training and workshops for principals and teachers to enhance their competence in teaching tolerance values. Strengthening collaboration with religious institutions and social organizations is also crucial to enrich students' understanding of diversity through interfaith programs. Furthermore, the government could introduce incentive schemes—such as operational support or awards—for madrasas that successfully apply religious moderation. Finally, documenting and disseminating good practices through mass and digital media would allow for the sharing of experiences and encourage wider adoption across madrasas in Indonesia.

### **Social Interaction of Non-Muslim Suku Laut Students with Muslim Students in MIN 1 Bintan**

Interaction can be understood as a reciprocal relationship that occurs between individuals, between individuals and groups, or between groups. The Suku Laut, who traditionally prefer a nomadic lifestyle and often live only with their families or within their own tribal groups, naturally develop different patterns of social interaction compared to those who live communally alongside other ethnic and religious groups. The former group tends to feel more comfortable in homogenous settings, where cultural and habitual practices are shared. In contrast, Suku Laut families who live side by side with other communities must learn to build constructive relationships across cultural and religious differences in order to create a peaceful and harmonious life (Miswanto, 2018).

In Kampung Panglong, Berakit Village, located at the northern tip of Bintan Island, the Suku Laut live alongside Malays, Bugis, and Chinese traders. Interethnic relations are reported to be harmonious, with no history of conflict arising from ethnic or religious differences. Social interaction occurs naturally in everyday spaces such as markets, stalls, fishing grounds, ports, and village events. Malay functions as the lingua franca of the village, enabling communication between the Suku Laut and other ethnic groups and facilitating integration within the wider community (Marisa Elsera et al., 2024).

Interviews with Suku Laut students at MIN 1 Bintan affirm this atmosphere of inclusion. Risman, a sixth-grade student, expressed happiness at attending the school, noting that he has always been free to interact and play with friends of different backgrounds without ever experiencing ridicule, even as a Catholic. Similarly, Celsia and Teresia, fifth-grade students, stated that they enjoy attending MIN 1 Bintan because of its welcoming environment. They also shared their choice to wear the

hijab, not because of compulsion, but as a personal expression that does not limit their freedom, including their passion for playing football. The school has actively supported these female Suku Laut students, who have represented Kampung Panglong in inter-village tournaments and achieved recognition. Muslim students at MIN 1 Bintan also regard the presence of Suku Laut students as ordinary. As Dewi, a student, explained, friendships and interactions are natural, both in play and in the classroom, where children of different ethnic and religious backgrounds often share the same bench and cannot easily be distinguished from one another.

The harmonious interaction at MIN 1 Bintan reflects the long-standing values of tolerance practiced in Kampung Panglong. Francis Xaverius Tintin, the Suku Laut chief, emphasized that no one in the village is permitted to impose religion in ways that would disrupt communal peace. Community leaders actively safeguard harmony, even stating that those who disturb the balance of social life would be asked to leave.

This ethos of mutual respect is evident in the coexistence of a Catholic church and a mosque within the same community, used respectively by different branches of Tintin's own family. Since the 1990s, MIN 1 Bintan has accommodated non-Muslim students, embodying the four indicators of religious moderation: strengthening national insight, practicing tolerance, rejecting violence (with no reports of bullying), and respecting local culture. The Suku Laut, alongside other ethnic groups in Berakit Village, are treated equally, and their children are given the same opportunities to learn and grow, making MIN 1 Bintan a living example of religious moderation in practice.

## Conclusion

The promotion of religious moderation by the Indonesian government has been effectively implemented in educational institutions, including Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri (MIN) 1 Bintan, located in Berakit Village, Bintan Regency, Riau Islands Province. Since the 1990s, this madrasah has served as an educational institution for the children of the Suku Laut community from Kampung Panglong, many of whom are Catholic and Protestant. In the 2024/2025 academic year, ten Suku Laut students are enrolled at MIN 1 Bintan, comprising seven Catholics and three Protestants.

The decision of the Suku Laut community to send their children to this madrasah is shaped by both historical ties and geographical proximity, as MIN 1 Bintan is the nearest school to their settlement. Within the learning process, the institution consistently upholds the principle of equal rights for all students, regardless of their religious or ethnic background. Student interactions are marked by harmony and inclusivity, creating a safe and welcoming learning environment.

The practice of religious moderation at MIN 1 Bintan is reflected in the application of four key indicators: national commitment, tolerance, rejection of violence, and respect for local culture. As the oldest madrasah in the Riau Islands Province, MIN 1 Bintan provides a valuable model for the implementation of religious moderation programs overseen by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, its location in a border area adjacent to Malaysia and Singapore enhances its strategic importance in strengthening religious moderation in frontier regions.

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