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## **Ritualizing Tolerance: How Shared Imtaq Practices Govern Religious Coexistence in a Plural Secondary School**

**Nuraeni, Mustain, Deddy Ramdhani**

Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia

Email: Nuraeni@gmail.com

### **ABSTRAK**

This study explores how shared IMTAQ practices operate as an institutional mechanism for governing religious coexistence within a plural secondary school setting. Departing from dominant approaches that frame religious tolerance as a curricular objective or moral instruction, this research reconceptualizes tolerance as a ritualized social process embedded in everyday institutional routines. Using a qualitative case study design, the study was conducted in a multi-religious public secondary school where students from different faith traditions participate in IMTAQ activities simultaneously. Data were generated through in-depth interviews with school leaders, teachers representing different religious backgrounds, and students, supported by sustained participant observation and analysis of institutional documents. The findings demonstrate that IMTAQ functions as a form of soft governance through ritual synchronization, spatial openness, and normative regulation, allowing religious diversity to be managed through shared practices rather than formal theological dialogue. These ritual arrangements normalize interreligious presence, reduce symbolic boundaries, and cultivate a stable pattern of religious coexistence without requiring doctrinal alignment or explicit tolerance discourse. Tolerance, in this context, emerges as a lived disposition shaped through repeated participation in institutionally structured rituals rather than as an abstract value transmitted through instruction. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the sociology of religion and religious governance by highlighting how everyday ritual practices within educational institutions can regulate pluralism and sustain social cohesion. By shifting analytical attention from religious teaching to ritual governance, this study offers a novel perspective on how tolerance is produced, embodied, and maintained in plural societies, extending current debates on lived religion and institutional responses to religious diversity.

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**Keywords:** *Interreligious coexistence, Lived religion, Ritual governance, Ritual synchronization, Religious tolerance*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Religious coexistence has become a central concern in plural societies where diversity is lived daily rather than merely acknowledged as a demographic condition. In educational institutions, schools function as structured social spaces in which young people repeatedly encounter religious difference through routine interaction, a condition that Knoblauch, (2023); Koukounaras Liagkis, (2022) identify as critical for shaping long-term social cohesion. Despite

this reality, research on religious tolerance in schools has largely emphasized curricular content and moral instruction, leaving everyday institutional practices underexamined. Studies such as Pajarianto et al., (2022) show that tolerance is often framed as a theological or ethical ideal rather than as a socially enacted process. This conceptual tendency limits our understanding of how tolerance is sustained in contexts where explicit instruction is minimal. Secondary schools, in particular, present a unique institutional environment where rituals, schedules, and spatial arrangements mediate interreligious interaction on a daily basis. As Cleton & Meier, (2023); Kitching, (2024) argues, the governance of religious diversity in schools frequently operates through implicit norms rather than formal policy. These conditions make schools a compelling site for examining tolerance as a lived institutional phenomenon rather than a normative aspiration.

The urgency of this research is further intensified by the growing recognition that religious coexistence is often regulated through subtle forms of governance embedded in routine practices. Cesari, (2025); Katz, (2024) demonstrates that schools tend to manage religious diversity through cooperative arrangements that rely on shared participation rather than legal enforcement. In this context, ritualized activities such as IMTAQ cannot be understood solely as spiritual exercises but must be examined as structured social practices organizing time, space, and authority. Research by Frost, (2023); Lussier, (2024) highlights how shared ritual spaces can normalize religious plurality without requiring doctrinal consensus. However, empirical investigations that focus specifically on how such rituals function within school institutions remain limited. Existing studies frequently prioritize dialogue-based or policy-driven explanations of tolerance, as seen in Aibekkyzy et al., (2025), while neglecting routine participation. This imbalance restricts theoretical insight into how coexistence is stabilized in everyday institutional life. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing sociological understandings of religion in plural educational settings.

The rationale for this study lies in the need to reconceptualize religious tolerance beyond normative instruction and interfaith dialogue. Much of the literature assumes that tolerance emerges through explicit communication and moral reasoning, an assumption questioned by Matthews et al., (2023); Verkuyten et al., (2022), who emphasizes acceptance as an outcome of habitual coexistence. In many school contexts, however, students experience religious diversity primarily through shared routines rather than structured dialogue. Guerin, (2025) shows that everyday practices often regulate religious difference implicitly, shaping behavior without overt evaluative discourse. This insight suggests that tolerance may be cultivated through participation rather than persuasion. The present study builds on this perspective by examining IMTAQ as a ritualized institutional practice rather than a pedagogical program. By focusing on ritual governance, the study responds to calls by Abbas et al., (2024) to examine religion as a product of institutional interaction. This approach enables a deeper understanding of tolerance as an embodied and socially regulated process.

## Literature Review

Scopus-indexed scholarship on religious tolerance has predominantly focused on dialogue, theology, and legal frameworks. Tilahun et al., (2026) examine interreligious marriage as a pathway to social integration, emphasizing interpersonal negotiation rather than institutional routines. Similarly, Al-Karbi et al., (2025) frame coexistence as a community-

driven moral project shaped by collective values. Policy-oriented perspectives are advanced by Kramer, (2025), who analyzes cooperative religious education models in plural school systems. Rahman et al., (2025) explore theological pluralism as a basis for tolerance, privileging doctrinal interpretation over everyday practice. While these studies contribute valuable insights, they largely conceptualize tolerance as an explicit moral or legal achievement. As a result, routine institutional mechanisms that sustain coexistence remain insufficiently explored. This limitation underscores the need for research that shifts attention from discourse to practice.

More recent studies have begun to address practice, space, and embodiment in interreligious contexts. Burchardt, (2023) demonstrates how material arrangements shape interreligious encounters, highlighting the importance of spatial openness. Utami, (2022) emphasizes interreligious competence in education but focuses primarily on pedagogical outcomes. Dulin, (2022) provides ethnographic evidence that tolerance often emerges through everyday interaction rather than explicit evaluation. Bakrač et al., (2023) examine post-conflict coexistence but center on dialogue and reconciliation. Tamer, (2023) proposes a shift from tolerance to acceptance grounded in habitual interaction. Despite these advances, few studies investigate ritualized school activities as governance mechanisms. The literature has yet to systematically examine how synchronized rituals structure participation and normalize difference. This absence positions the present study as a necessary empirical and theoretical contribution.

Despite the growing literature on religious tolerance, several analytical gaps persist. Most existing studies prioritize dialogue, theology, or policy frameworks while overlooking routine institutional practices. Educational institutions are often treated as pedagogical spaces rather than as sites of everyday governance. Tolerance is commonly conceptualized as an attitude or outcome instead of a process enacted through participation. Ritualized activities within schools remain under-theorized in relation to religious coexistence. The interaction between ritual synchronization and spatial openness has received limited empirical attention. Few studies examine how institutional norms regulate religious difference without coercion. As a result, the lived experience of tolerance among students remains insufficiently understood. This gap constrains broader theoretical debates on pluralism and social cohesion.

The purpose of this study is to examine how shared IMTAQ practices function as an institutional mechanism for governing religious coexistence in a plural secondary school context. The study analyzes how ritual synchronization structures participation among students from different religious backgrounds. It explores how spatial openness within ritual practices shapes everyday interreligious encounters. The research investigates how institutional norms regulate religious expression without enforcing doctrinal conformity. Rather than framing tolerance as a formally taught value, the study conceptualizes tolerance as a lived disposition emerging from routine participation. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research captures how religious difference is normalized in daily school life. The study also clarifies the role of soft governance in sustaining social cohesion. Ultimately, it contributes to theoretical debates on lived religion and institutional management of pluralism.

## METODE

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how shared IMTAQ practices function as mechanisms of ritual governance in a plural secondary school context. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research aims to understand tolerance as a lived and socially enacted process rather than as a measurable attitudinal outcome, as emphasized by Raihani, (n.d.) in qualitative organizational research. The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of institutional routines, ritual practices, and social interactions within their natural setting. This approach is particularly suitable for investigating complex social phenomena embedded in everyday practices, as argued by Fuhse, (2022) when examining contextualized social processes. The research was conducted in a public secondary school characterized by religious diversity and routine implementation of IMTAQ activities. The school was treated as a bounded social system in which ritual practices, spatial arrangements, and institutional norms intersect. Rather than aiming for statistical generalization, the study seeks analytical generalization by linking empirical findings to broader theoretical discussions on lived religion. This design aligns with the focus of the journal on religion as a social and institutional phenomenon rather than a purely doctrinal issue.

### Participants

Participants in this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key institutional actors involved in IMTAQ practices. The sample included school leaders responsible for policy and institutional regulation, teachers representing different religious backgrounds, and students actively participating in IMTAQ activities. This selection strategy follows the principle that qualitative inquiry prioritizes information-rich cases, as discussed by Habersang & Reihlen, (2025) in qualitative sampling strategies. School leaders were included to capture institutional perspectives on ritual organization and normative regulation. Teachers were selected to reflect diverse religious affiliations and their roles in mediating ritual participation. Students were chosen to provide insight into lived experiences of religious coexistence within routine school practices. Participation was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the purpose and ethical considerations of the study. This participant composition enabled triangulation across institutional, pedagogical, and experiential perspectives.

### Instrument

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to capture the complexity of ritual governance and lived religious experience. Semi-structured interview guides were developed to explore participants' perceptions of IMTAQ practices, institutional norms, and interreligious interaction, following the flexibility recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). Interview questions were open-ended to allow participants to articulate experiences in their own terms while remaining aligned with the research focus. Participant observation was conducted during IMTAQ activities to document ritual synchronization, spatial arrangements, and patterns of interaction, drawing on observational principles outlined by (Mentel, 2022). Field notes were used to record both descriptive and reflective observations. Institutional

documents, including schedules and activity guidelines, were analyzed to understand formal and informal regulation of ritual practices. The combination of these instruments allowed for methodological triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the findings. This multi-instrument approach is consistent with qualitative standards in sociological studies of religion.

### Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis was conducted through an iterative thematic analysis process aimed at identifying patterns related to ritual governance and religious coexistence. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were first subjected to open coding to capture recurring concepts, following the analytic procedures described by (Dahal, 2025). Codes were then grouped into broader categories reflecting ritual synchronization, spatial openness, normative regulation, and lived tolerance. During the axial coding stage, relationships among categories were examined to understand how institutional routines structured interreligious interaction. Analytical memos were written throughout the process to support reflexivity and theoretical sensitivity. Themes were refined through constant comparison across data sources to ensure consistency and depth. The analysis focused on how tolerance emerged through participation rather than explicit instruction. This analytic strategy enabled the study to link empirical findings to broader theoretical discussions on lived religion and institutional governance.

**Table 1.** Data Sources and Analytical Focus

Data Source	Participants / Material	Analytical Focus
Interviews	School leaders, teachers, students	Institutional norms, lived experiences
Observation	IMTAQ activities	Ritual synchronization, spatial openness
Documents	Schedules, guidelines	Normative regulation

Table 1 summarizes how each dataset contributed to the study's analytical goals and clarifies the logic of triangulation. Interviews with school leaders, teachers, and students provided complementary viewpoints on how IMTAQ is organized, interpreted, and experienced, allowing the analysis to connect institutional intentions with classroom level mediation and student lived experience. Observation during IMTAQ activities captured what participants actually did in practice, including the sequencing of routines, the simultaneity of participation, and the spatial arrangements that made interreligious presence visible and normal. Institutional documents such as schedules and activity guidelines offered a formal trace of how participation was structured, helping to identify the norms that regulated ritual conduct even when they were not explicitly articulated in interviews. By aligning each data source with a specific analytical focus, the table shows that the study did not rely on a single perspective or method to make claims about ritual governance. Instead, patterns identified in one source were checked against the others, strengthening credibility and reducing the risk of over interpreting individual accounts. Overall, the table makes the methodological pathway transparent, showing how evidence was assembled to explain how tolerance is produced through routine participation rather than through explicit instruction.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### **Ritual Synchronization as the Foundation of Institutional Coexistence**

The results indicate that IMTAQ activities were organized through synchronized scheduling that aligned religious practices across different student groups. This synchronization did not aim to unify doctrines but structured participation within a shared temporal framework. Observational data show that students perceived the simultaneity of practices as a routine school activity rather than as an imposed interreligious arrangement. Teachers emphasized that synchronized timing reduced symbolic competition among religious groups. Students reported that repeated exposure to parallel practices fostered familiarity and predictability. Institutional documents confirmed that synchronized IMTAQ scheduling was consistently maintained across academic periods. This regularity transformed religious diversity into an expected aspect of school life. Overall, ritual synchronization functioned as the initial mechanism stabilizing everyday coexistence.

**Table 2.** Patterns of Ritual Synchronization in IMTAQ Activities

Dimension	Observed Pattern	Institutional Function
Time	Simultaneous scheduling	Equalization of participation
Participation	Parallel devotion	Visibility without comparison
Rhythm	Recurrent routine	Normalization of diversity

Table 2 clarifies how synchronization operated at the institutional level by coordinating time and participation, thereby preventing hierarchical differentiation among religious groups while normalizing plural presence.

#### **Spatial Openness and the Regulation of Religious Visibility**

The findings further reveal that spatial arrangements during IMTAQ activities were deliberately organized to balance separation and openness. Different religious groups practiced in adjacent but clearly identifiable spaces within the same institutional environment. This arrangement allowed students to observe religious difference without direct interaction. Interviews suggest that such visibility reduced uncertainty and informal stereotyping. Teachers noted that spatial openness prevented physical segregation while maintaining doctrinal boundaries. Students described the shared environment as fostering a sense of collective belonging. Institutional guidelines implicitly supported this configuration by avoiding rigid spatial isolation. Consequently, space emerged as a regulatory element shaping how coexistence was experienced.

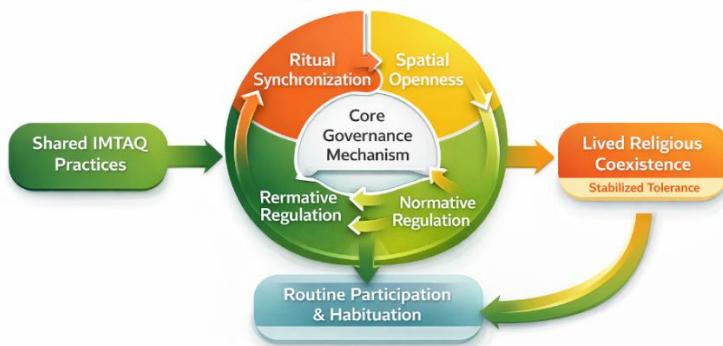
**Table 3.** Spatial Arrangement and Coexistence Dynamics

Spatial Feature	Function	Observed Outcome
Adjacent rooms	Parallel practice	Mutual recognition
Open corridors	Symbolic connection	Reduced segregation
Shared boundaries	Institutional oversight	Orderly coexistence

Table 3 shows how spatial design regulated coexistence by enabling visibility without intrusion, reinforcing tolerance through everyday spatial experience.

### Normative Regulation through Routine Institutional Practice

The data demonstrate that tolerance was regulated primarily through institutional routines rather than explicit moral instruction. School leaders framed IMTAQ as a governance practice embedded in daily school management. Teachers focused on behavioral order and mutual respect instead of theological explanation. Students internalized expectations through repetition rather than formal guidance. Document analysis shows that institutional rules emphasized conduct, timing, and participation. This approach redirected attention from belief differences to shared routines. Over time, students came to treat coexistence as an ordinary condition of schooling. These findings indicate that tolerance emerged as a habitual disposition shaped by institutional practice.



**Figure 1.** Ritual Governance of Religious Coexistence through Shared IMTAQ Practices

Figure 1 integrates the empirical findings by illustrating how shared IMTAQ practices operate as a system of ritual governance. Ritual synchronization, spatial openness, and normative regulation interact to structure routine participation among students from different religious backgrounds. Through repeated engagement, tolerance is not taught explicitly but emerges as a lived disposition embedded in everyday school life.

### Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that ritual synchronization operates as a form of institutional governance that stabilizes religious coexistence through routine participation. This supports Plotnikof & Mumby, (2024) argument that temporal coordination can normalize pluralism by embedding difference within everyday practice rather than explicit negotiation. Unlike dialogue-based approaches emphasized by Rinott & Tractinsky, (2022), the synchronization observed in IMTAQ does not require verbal interaction to produce mutual recognition. Instead, coexistence emerges through repeated exposure to parallel religious practices. This pattern aligns with Küçükuncular & Ertugan, (2025) concept of acceptance formed through habitual social engagement rather than moral instruction. The results also resonate with Dulin's (2022) observation that everyday practices often regulate evaluation implicitly. By coordinating time, the institution minimizes symbolic competition among

religious groups. Thus, ritual synchronization functions as a foundational mechanism of soft governance within the school.

Spatial openness further reinforces ritual governance by shaping how religious difference becomes visible and intelligible. As noted by Burchardt, (2023), spatial arrangements play a crucial role in mediating interreligious encounters through material and symbolic design. In this study, adjacent spaces enabled recognition without intrusion, reducing anxiety associated with unfamiliar practices. This finding extends Larson, (2022) work on interreligious competence by shifting the focus from individual skills to institutional spatial experience. Unlike community-based coexistence models discussed by Al-Karbi, Al-Salhi, and Al-Karbi (2025), spatial governance here operated silently within routine school life. The arrangement avoided both forced integration and segregation. Alméstar & Romero-Muñoz, (2025) emphasis on cooperative institutional design is reflected in how space facilitated coexistence without dialogue. Consequently, space emerges as a key regulatory dimension of lived religious pluralism.

The study also challenges pedagogical models that frame tolerance as an outcome of explicit moral or theological instruction. Rather than teaching tolerance directly, the institution cultivated it through normative routines embedded in IMTAQ practices. This supports Zaimina, (2025) argument that religion is co-produced through institutional interaction rather than solely through belief transmission. In contrast to Bano et al., (2022), who emphasize theological pluralism, the findings suggest that coexistence can be sustained without doctrinal engagement. Students learned appropriate conduct through observation and repetition, a process consistent with Ye et al., (2023) view of education as a socializing institution. Ahmad's (2021) focus on ethical discourse is complemented here by evidence of embodied learning. Normative regulation redirected attention from belief differences to shared participation. This mechanism appears to produce a more stable form of tolerance.

Conceptually, the findings reposition tolerance as a lived disposition rather than a declared value. This perspective responds to calls by Huda, (2025) to move beyond tolerance as a normative slogan toward acceptance grounded in everyday life. By analyzing IMTAQ as ritual governance, the study bridges educational research and the sociology of religion. It also addresses gaps identified in Tilahun, Gatisso, and Ali (2026), whose focus on interpersonal relations overlooks institutional routines. The results show that institutions can manage diversity without constant negotiation or conflict resolution. Routine participation becomes a stabilizing force that reduces the salience of difference. This insight expands theoretical debates on how pluralism is maintained in structured social settings. Consequently, the study contributes a practice-oriented lens to existing scholarship.

Finally, the findings highlight the importance of soft governance in plural educational contexts. Unlike legal or policy-driven models analyzed by Alamsyah, (2025), ritual governance operates through habituation rather than enforcement. This approach minimizes resistance because norms are embedded in everyday routines. The study confirms Dulin's (2022) claim that regulation can occur without explicit evaluation. By normalizing difference through routine, the institution avoids ideological confrontation. This challenges assumptions that coexistence requires dialogue or consensus building, as often implied by Bakrač et al. (2023). Instead, structured participation becomes the primary mechanism of stability. Overall,

the discussion positions ritual governance as a critical yet underexplored dimension of religious coexistence.

### **Implications**

The findings imply that schools can manage religious diversity effectively through routine-based governance rather than explicit moral instruction. By structuring time and space, institutions can normalize pluralism without intensifying doctrinal differences. This offers policymakers an alternative framework for promoting tolerance in sensitive educational contexts. For educators, the study highlights the importance of ritual and routine in shaping social behavior. The concept of ritual governance may inform the design of inclusive school programs beyond religious settings. Academically, the study strengthens practice-oriented approaches in the sociology of religion. It also demonstrates the value of analyzing lived religion within institutional frameworks. These implications extend to broader discussions on governance and social cohesion.

### **Limitations**

This study is limited by its focus on a single secondary school, which restricts statistical generalization. The findings reflect a specific institutional and cultural context. Data were collected using qualitative methods that prioritize depth over breadth. The study did not incorporate longitudinal observation across multiple academic cycles. Student perspectives were captured at a particular stage of their educational experience. Instances of conflict or disruption were not the primary focus. These limitations define the scope of interpretation rather than undermining validity. Future research can address these constraints through comparative and longitudinal designs.

### **Suggestions**

Future studies could compare ritual governance across different types of schools or religious contexts. Longitudinal research may reveal how tolerance evolves through sustained participation over time. Comparative studies across regions or countries could strengthen analytical generalization. Researchers may also examine moments of disruption to assess the resilience of ritual governance. Mixed-method approaches could complement qualitative insights with broader pattern analysis. Further work might explore the role of student agency within institutional routines. Expanding the framework to non-religious rituals could test its wider applicability. Such directions would deepen understanding of coexistence in plural societies.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that religious tolerance in plural secondary schools can be effectively governed through routine-based institutional practices rather than explicit moral instruction or interreligious dialogue. By examining shared IMTAQ activities as a form of ritual governance, the findings show how synchronized participation, spatial openness, and normative regulation collectively normalize religious difference in everyday school life. Tolerance emerges not as a formally taught value but as a lived disposition shaped through repeated engagement in parallel religious practices. This process enables students to recognize difference without confrontation and to internalize coexistence as an ordinary condition of social

interaction. The study advances existing scholarship by shifting analytical attention from discourse and policy toward embodied and institutional dimensions of lived religion. Conceptually, it reframes tolerance as a product of habituation embedded in routine participation rather than ideological agreement. Empirically, it provides evidence that soft governance mechanisms can sustain pluralism without coercion or theological negotiation. Overall, the article contributes a novel and underexplored perspective to debates on religion, education, and social cohesion, positioning ritual governance as a key framework for understanding how coexistence is practically achieved in plural institutional settings.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nuraeni conceived the research idea, designed the study, conducted data collection, and led the analysis and interpretation of the findings. Mustain contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, supported data analysis, and critically reviewed the manuscript for conceptual coherence and scholarly rigor. Deddy Ramdhani provided methodological guidance, supervised the research process, and contributed to the refinement of the discussion and conclusions. All authors reviewed, edited, and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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