

Glocalization of Islamic Education among Khmer Muslims in Post-Conflict Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Islamic education in post-conflict minority contexts serves as an important arena for negotiating state integration, religious identity, and community reconstruction. This study examines the glocalization of Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia, focusing on how Islamic educational institutions adapt to national education requirements while preserving religious and cultural identity. Using a qualitative historical-analytical design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 18 participants, including school administrators, teachers, religious leaders, and community education activists, supported by analysis of policy documents, institutional records, donor publications, and archival materials. The findings reveal three major patterns. First, curriculum integration is implemented as strategic adaptation, in which national subjects are selectively adopted to support recognition and student mobility while Islamic instruction remains central to identity formation. Second, institutional governance is hybrid and negotiated, involving state regulation, community authority, parental expectations, and donor influence under asymmetrical power relations. Third, Islamic education functions as a site of identity reconstruction by restoring religious knowledge, collective memory, and moral belonging after historical disruption. The study concludes that glocalization in minority Islamic education is not a seamless process of integration but a negotiated practice shaped by constraint, agency, and survival. These findings refine glocalization theory and highlight the need for flexible, context-sensitive education policies that recognize epistemological plurality and support substantive inclusion for minority communities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education in post-conflict societies functions not only as a mechanism for reconstruction but also as a critical arena where identity, inclusion, and political belonging are negotiated. In contexts marked by historical violence and marginalisation, education becomes a socio-political space in which collective memory, cultural identity, and future aspirations are reconstructed. This is particularly evident in minority education, where schooling often mediates tensions between state-driven integration agendas and community efforts to preserve cultural and religious distinctiveness (McCowan, 2021).

In Cambodia, these dynamics are acutely experienced by the Khmer Muslim minority, whose educational institutions were systematically dismantled during the Khmer Rouge regime (1975–1979).

The destruction of religious infrastructure and the suppression of Islamic practices created a profound rupture in the transmission of religious knowledge. Since the 1990s, Khmer Muslim communities have gradually rebuilt Islamic educational institutions, including madrasahs and mosque-based schools, while simultaneously engaging with the regulatory framework of a secular national education system (Dryden-Peterson, 2021). This dual engagement places Islamic education at the intersection of integration and identity preservation.

Despite growing scholarly attention to education in fragile and post-conflict settings, there remains limited empirical research examining how minority Islamic education systems actively negotiate these tensions over time, particularly within Southeast Asia. Existing studies on Islamic education in the region tend to emphasize structural challenges such as teacher capacity, curriculum alignment, and state recognition (Musa, 2020; Komatsu & Rappleye, 2023). While these studies provide important insights, they often portray minority communities as passive recipients of policy rather than active agents shaping educational practices. Similarly, research on post-conflict education has largely focused on peacebuilding outcomes and system reconstruction (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2020; Sriprakash, 2020), with limited attention to how minority educational institutions negotiate governance and curriculum in everyday practice.

The concept of glocalization offers a useful framework for understanding how global educational norms are interpreted, adapted, and contested within local contexts (Carney, 2020; Tikly, 2019). Rather than viewing globalization as a linear process, glocalization emphasizes the role of local actors in shaping educational change. However, much of this literature tends to privilege local agency without sufficiently addressing the structural constraints that shape such agency, particularly in post-conflict minority settings (Steiner-Khamisi, 2021). As a result, glocalization is often framed as a relatively smooth process of adaptation, overlooking the asymmetrical power relations embedded in education governance. Moreover, empirical applications of this framework to Islamic education in post-conflict minority contexts remain limited.

The Cambodian case offers a critical yet underexplored context for addressing these gaps. As a post-genocide society undergoing long-term reconstruction, Cambodia presents a setting in which education is shaped by historical disruption, evolving state governance, and sustained donor involvement (Menashy & Shields, 2022; Pherali, 2020). For Khmer Muslims, Islamic education functions not only as a means of knowledge transmission but also as a mechanism for restoring identity, rebuilding community cohesion, and negotiating social inclusion. Examining this case contributes to global debates on minority education by demonstrating how educational inclusion is negotiated under conditions of structural vulnerability, rather than achieved through standardized policy frameworks.

Building on this context, this study examines the glocalization of Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia. It conceptualizes Islamic education not as a marginal or oppositional subsystem, but as a dynamic practice shaped by interactions between state policy, community agency, and global educational influences. By adopting a qualitative historical-analytical approach, the study traces how Islamic educational institutions have evolved from the early post-conflict period to the present.

This article makes three key contributions. Empirically, it provides new insights into Islamic education in Cambodia, a context that remains underrepresented in international scholarship. Theoretically, it refines the concept of glocalization by demonstrating that it involves strategic negotiation under asymmetrical power relations rather than seamless adaptation. From a policy perspective, the study highlights the importance of context-sensitive and flexible education frameworks that recognize epistemological plurality and support more equitable inclusion of minority communities (Menashy, 2021; Verger et al., 2021). Accordingly, this study aims to analyze how Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia is shaped through ongoing negotiations between national integration policies, community-based identity concerns, and global educational influences.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a historical-analytical design to examine the glocalization of Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia. This design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand not only current educational practices, but also the historical processes through which Islamic educational institutions have been reconstructed, adapted, and negotiated since the post-conflict transition. Rather than measuring educational outcomes statistically, the study focused on the meanings, practices, and institutional negotiations through which Muslim minority communities respond to national integration policies, community-based identity concerns, and global educational influences.

The historical-analytical orientation enabled the study to situate contemporary Islamic education within the broader trajectory of post-conflict reconstruction. In this sense, Islamic educational institutions were analyzed not as static religious schools, but as evolving social institutions shaped by historical disruption, changing state regulation, community authority, and donor-supported educational development. The qualitative design allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, institutional memories, and interpretations of curriculum, governance, and identity formation.

2.2 Research Context and Site Selection

The research was conducted in Khmer Muslim communities in Cambodia where Islamic educational institutions, including madrasahs and mosque-based schools, have been actively reconstructed and developed after the post-conflict period. The selected research sites were chosen because they represented community-based Islamic education settings that had experienced direct negotiation with national education requirements, religious authority structures, and external educational support.

The site selection was guided by three considerations. First, the communities had a visible history of Islamic educational reconstruction after the disruption of the Khmer Rouge period. Second, the institutions had engaged, either formally or informally, with national curriculum expectations and state recognition processes. Third, the schools had experienced varying degrees of community and donor involvement, making them relevant for examining glocalization as a process of negotiation between local, national, and global influences.

2.3 Participants and Sampling Rationale

A total of 18 participants were involved in the study. They consisted of five school administrators, six teachers, four religious leaders, and three community education activists. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because the study required information-rich participants who had direct knowledge of Islamic educational practices, institutional governance, curriculum adaptation, and community-based identity concerns.

School administrators were included because they were directly involved in institutional decision-making, curriculum planning, relations with state authorities, and communication with donors or external organizations. Teachers were selected because they experienced curriculum integration at the classroom level and could explain how national and religious subjects were balanced in everyday pedagogical practice. Religious leaders were included because they played an important role in legitimizing Islamic education, preserving religious values, and mediating community expectations. Community education activists were selected because they were involved in broader educational advocacy, community mobilization, and institutional support.

The inclusion criteria required participants to have direct involvement in Islamic education for at least three years, familiarity with curriculum or governance issues, and willingness to discuss educational change in relation to post-conflict reconstruction and minority identity. The diversity of participant categories was intended to capture multiple perspectives and avoid relying on a single institutional voice.

2.4 Data Saturation

Data saturation was assessed throughout the data collection and analysis process. After each round of interviews, preliminary notes and emerging codes were reviewed to determine whether new information was still being generated. Saturation was considered to have been reached when additional interviews no longer produced substantially new themes related to curriculum integration, governance arrangements, donor influence, community authority, and identity reconstruction.

By the final stage of data collection, the main themes had become recurrent across participant groups. The last interviews mainly confirmed, refined, and contextualized existing categories rather than generating new analytical themes. This indicated that sufficient conceptual saturation had been achieved for the purposes of the study. However, saturation was understood not as the exhaustion of all possible experiences within Khmer Muslim communities, but as the point at which the collected data were adequate to support the analytical focus of this research.

2.5 Data Collection

Data collection was carried out over a four-month period from June to September 2023. Primary data were generated through semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting approximately 45 to 90 minutes. The semi-structured interview format was chosen because it provided a balance between comparability across participants and flexibility to explore individual experiences in greater depth.

The interview questions focused on four major areas: the historical development of Islamic educational institutions after the conflict period; curriculum practices and the integration of national subjects; governance relations among schools, religious leaders, state authorities, parents, and donors; and the role of Islamic education in preserving religious identity and supporting social inclusion. Follow-up questions were used to clarify participants' meanings, request concrete examples, and explore tensions or contradictions in their responses.

In addition to interviews, secondary data were collected from policy documents, institutional records, donor publications, school reports, and archival materials relevant to Islamic education, minority education, and post-conflict educational reconstruction in Cambodia. These documents were used to contextualize participants' accounts and to triangulate claims concerning state regulation, institutional development, and external educational influence.

2.6 Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis that combined inductive coding and theory-informed interpretation. The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, all interview transcripts and documentary materials were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the data. During this stage, the researcher wrote preliminary memos to record initial impressions, recurrent issues, and possible analytical connections. Second, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful segments of data related to curriculum integration, teacher capacity, religious instruction, community authority, state regulation, donor support, institutional autonomy, and identity preservation.

Third, axial coding was used to examine relationships among the initial codes. Codes that referred to similar processes were grouped into broader categories. For example, codes related to national subjects, certification, student mobility, and religious curriculum were grouped under the category of curriculum negotiation. Codes related to religious leaders, parental trust, state recognition, donor reporting, and school decision-making were grouped under governance and authority. Codes concerning memory, religious continuity, moral formation, and belonging were grouped under identity reconstruction.

Fourth, theoretical coding was applied by interpreting the categories through the concept of glocalization. At this stage, the analysis focused on how local educational actors selectively adopted, adapted, resisted, or reinterpreted national and global educational discourses. Particular attention was given to asymmetrical power relations, including the influence of state recognition, donor dependency, limited teacher capacity, and community expectations.

The coding process was conducted manually. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the process to document coding decisions, emerging interpretations, contradictory evidence, and possible

researcher bias. The final themes were developed by comparing patterns across participant groups and documentary sources. Three central themes were generated from this process: curriculum integration as strategic adaptation, hybrid governance and negotiated authority, and Islamic education as a glocalized practice of identity reconstruction.

2.7 Trustworthiness and Validation

Several strategies were used to strengthen the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the findings. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of interview data and documentary sources. The researcher compared participants' accounts with policy documents, institutional reports, and donor-related materials to identify convergence, discrepancy, and contextual variation.

Member checking was conducted with selected participants to verify whether the researcher's interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perspectives. This process helped refine several interpretations, particularly those related to curriculum balance, donor influence, and the role of religious leaders in institutional decision-making.

Peer debriefing was also used to strengthen analytical rigor. Preliminary codes, categories, and themes were discussed with academic colleagues familiar with qualitative research, minority education, and post-conflict educational contexts. These discussions helped challenge premature interpretations and encouraged more careful attention to alternative explanations.

Dependability was supported by maintaining an audit trail consisting of interview guides, coding notes, analytical memos, and documentation of theme development. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive memoing, which enabled the researcher to examine how personal assumptions, theoretical preferences, and positionality could influence the interpretation of data. Transferability was addressed by providing contextual descriptions of the research setting, participant categories, and institutional conditions, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other minority and post-conflict education contexts.

2.8 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity was an important part of the research process because the study dealt with sensitive issues related to religion, minority identity, historical violence, and post-conflict reconstruction. The researcher recognized that the interpretation of participants' narratives could be influenced by prior academic assumptions about Islamic education, minority communities, and global education policy. To minimize this risk, the researcher maintained reflexive memos throughout data collection and analysis.

These memos recorded moments when the researcher's assumptions were challenged by participants' accounts, especially when participants described integration not as assimilation, but as a necessary strategy for institutional survival and student mobility. Reflexive notes were also used to examine how power relations between researcher and participants might affect interview responses. Participants may have been cautious when discussing state regulation, donor influence, or internal community tensions. Therefore, the researcher avoided leading questions, allowed participants to define issues in their own terms, and treated silence, hesitation, and indirect responses as meaningful contextual data.

The researcher also sought to avoid representing Khmer Muslim communities as passive victims of conflict or as isolated religious groups. Instead, the analysis was guided by an effort to present participants as active educational actors who negotiate constraints, reinterpret external demands, and sustain religious and cultural continuity under changing political and institutional conditions.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. Informed consent was obtained before each interview. Participants' identities were anonymized by using codes rather than personal names, and identifying details about individuals and institutions were removed or generalized where necessary.

Given the sensitivity of post-conflict memory, minority identity, and religious education, particular care was taken to avoid questions or representations that could reinforce stigma, expose participants to risk, or misrepresent community practices. The researcher also ensured that data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. Ethical practice was treated not merely as a procedural requirement, but as an ongoing responsibility to represent participants and their communities with accuracy, respect, and contextual sensitivity.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

The findings of this study show that Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia is shaped by continuous negotiation between national integration, religious identity preservation, community authority, and external educational influences. Islamic educational institutions do not operate merely as religious schools separated from the national system. Rather, they function as community-based educational spaces where children are prepared to participate in Cambodian society while remaining rooted in Islamic moral, cultural, and historical traditions.

The everyday life of these institutions reflects the legacy of historical disruption. In many communities, Islamic education was not only understood as a means of teaching religious knowledge, but also as a way of repairing the rupture caused by the Khmer Rouge period, when religious practices, teachers, texts, and institutions were severely disrupted. Participants repeatedly described Islamic schools as places where children learned “how to live as Muslims” while also gaining knowledge required for broader social participation. This dual purpose shaped how curriculum, governance, and identity were negotiated in daily educational practice. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: curriculum integration as strategic adaptation, hybrid governance and negotiated authority, and Islamic education as a glocalized practice of identity reconstruction.

3.1.1 Curriculum Integration as Strategic Adaptation

Curriculum integration was experienced by Islamic educational actors not as a simple process of adopting the state curriculum, but as a selective and strategic response to the demands of formal recognition, student mobility, and community survival. Islamic schools incorporated elements of the national curriculum because they recognised that students needed access to formal educational pathways, certificates, and broader opportunities in Cambodian society. However, this integration was carefully limited so that religious instruction would remain the core of the institution.

In the schools described by participants, the curriculum was organised around a dual educational logic. National subjects such as language, mathematics, and social studies were viewed as necessary for students’ future access to higher education and employment. At the same time, Qur’anic recitation, Arabic literacy, Islamic ethics, and religious practice were regarded as essential for maintaining Muslim identity across generations. This arrangement created a daily timetable in which national and religious subjects coexisted, but not without tension.

One school administrator described this balance as follows:

“We know that our children cannot live only inside the community. They need certificates, they need Khmer language, they need mathematics, and they need to continue their studies. But if the school loses Qur’an and Islamic lessons, then parents will ask: what is the difference between this school and any other school? For us, national subjects are important, but religion is the heart of the school.” (SA2, school administrator, July 2023)

This statement illustrates that curriculum integration was not perceived as a purely pedagogical adjustment. It was a matter of institutional legitimacy and community trust. Administrators understood that state-recognized subjects could open social and economic opportunities for students, but they also feared that excessive alignment with the national curriculum could weaken the school’s religious purpose. Integration was therefore implemented as a controlled process: enough to gain recognition, but not so much that Islamic identity became secondary.

Teachers experienced this negotiation at the classroom level. They had to manage limited instructional time, students' varying academic abilities, and community expectations that children should master both religious and general knowledge.

One teacher explained:

"Sometimes the problem is not whether we agree with the national curriculum or not. The problem is time. In one day, we must teach reading, writing, mathematics, Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic manners. The children become tired, and teachers also feel pressure. We try to divide the time, but there is always something that must be reduced." (T3, teacher, August 2023)

This quote shows the practical difficulty of curriculum integration. While policy discourse often frames curriculum alignment as an institutional reform, teachers experience it as a daily struggle over time, content, and priority. The challenge is not merely technical; it reflects a deeper epistemological tension between state-defined educational standards and community-defined religious obligations.

A religious leader further emphasized that religious education could not be treated as an optional supplement:

"For our community, Islamic knowledge is not extra knowledge. It is the foundation. A child may become a good worker or a good citizen, but if he does not know how to pray, how to read Qur'an, or how to respect Islamic values, then we feel that education is incomplete." (RL1, religious leader, July 2023)

This view reveals that Islamic education carries moral and communal responsibilities that go beyond academic achievement. While national curriculum integration was accepted as necessary, it was not allowed to redefine the basic purpose of schooling. For religious leaders, education had to produce not only capable students, but also morally responsible Muslims.

At the same time, participants did not reject national integration. Several teachers and administrators viewed national curriculum subjects as tools that could help Muslim students avoid marginalization. One teacher stated:

"In the past, some parents were afraid that if children studied too much outside knowledge, they would forget religion. But now many parents understand that our children must be able to compete. They need both. If they only study religion, their future may be limited. If they only study general subjects, their identity may become weak." (T5, teacher, September 2023)

This statement captures the strategic logic of curriculum integration. Islamic schools were not resisting the state curriculum in an oppositional sense. Instead, they were adapting to it selectively, translating national educational requirements into a framework that remained meaningful to the community. Integration became a way to protect students from exclusion while preserving religious continuity.

Thus, curriculum integration among Khmer Muslim Islamic schools should be understood as strategic adaptation. It does not represent full assimilation into the national system, nor does it represent rejection of state education. Rather, it reflects an ongoing negotiation in which Islamic educational actors selectively adopt national curriculum components to secure institutional recognition, student mobility, and community legitimacy.

3.1.2 Hybrid Governance and Negotiated Authority

The governance of Islamic education among Khmer Muslims was characterized by overlapping authority involving the state, community leaders, school administrators, teachers, parents, and donor organizations. These actors did not possess equal power. The state controlled formal recognition and curriculum standards; the community provided moral legitimacy and social trust; donors contributed infrastructure, training, and material support; while school-level actors mediated these demands in everyday practice.

This hybrid governance structure was visible in how decisions were made. School administrators often had to consider whether a decision would satisfy state regulations, meet donor reporting expectations, and remain acceptable to religious leaders and parents. Governance was therefore not a

linear process of implementing policy from above. It was a negotiated process shaped by competing expectations and unequal resources.

One community education activist described this complexity:

"The school is in the middle. The government asks for standards, the community asks for Islamic values, parents ask for discipline and good behaviour, and donors ask for reports and programmes. The school cannot ignore any of them. Every decision must be discussed carefully because each side has its own expectation." (CEA1, community education activist, August 2023)

This quote highlights the multi-layered nature of educational governance. Islamic schools had to maintain formal visibility to the state while preserving trust within the community. At the same time, they depended on external support to sustain educational activities, especially in areas where local financial capacity was limited.

Community authority was particularly significant because Islamic educational institutions were historically rebuilt through local initiative. Religious leaders, elders, and mosque committees were not only symbolic figures; they played an active role in determining whether a school was seen as legitimate. Their approval influenced parental trust, teacher authority, and the moral direction of the institution.

A religious leader explained:

"After the conflict, many things were lost. Teachers were lost, books were lost, and many people did not know how to continue religious learning. So the community had to rebuild slowly. The school belongs to the community, not only to the teachers. That is why religious leaders must be involved, because we are responsible for protecting the faith of the children." (RL3, religious leader, July 2023)

This statement shows that community governance was rooted in post-conflict memory. The authority of religious leaders was not merely administrative; it was connected to the historical responsibility of restoring Islamic knowledge after a period of destruction. This gave community actors strong legitimacy in educational decision-making.

However, participants also indicated that community authority could sometimes constrain innovation. Some teachers described difficulties in introducing new pedagogical methods, especially when these methods were perceived as too modern, too unfamiliar, or insufficiently connected to traditional religious learning. One teacher stated:

"We want to make the classroom more active. We want students to ask questions, work in groups, and use new materials. But sometimes older people think that good learning means sitting quietly, listening, and memorizing. We must introduce changes slowly so that the community does not think we are changing the religion." (T2, teacher, September 2023)

This illustrates the ambivalent role of community authority. On one hand, it strengthened institutional legitimacy and protected religious identity. On the other hand, it could limit pedagogical flexibility and slow down professional innovation. The issue was not simply resistance to change, but concern that new methods might weaken the moral discipline associated with traditional Islamic learning.

Donor involvement introduced another layer of negotiation. Participants generally acknowledged that donor support had been important for rebuilding school infrastructure, providing learning materials, and improving teacher capacity. However, donor-funded programmes also came with external priorities, reporting requirements, and project-based timelines that sometimes did not align fully with local needs.

One administrator explained:

"Donor support helped us a lot, especially for buildings, books, and training. But sometimes the programme already has its own format. We must follow the indicators, write reports, and show results in the way they ask. The community's needs are sometimes more flexible than the project design." (SA4, school administrator, August 2023)

This statement indicates that donor support was both enabling and constraining. It strengthened institutional capacity, yet it also introduced accountability structures that could reshape school

priorities. In some cases, schools adjusted their activities to fit donor frameworks, even when local actors had different understandings of what educational improvement should mean.

Another community activist described the dependency created by external support:

"When support comes, the school becomes stronger. But when the project ends, we worry about what will happen next. The community wants independence, but many schools still need outside help. This is the difficult situation." (CEA2, community education activist, September 2023)

This reveals that hybrid governance is not merely a cooperative arrangement among stakeholders. It is also shaped by asymmetrical power relations. The state provides recognition, donors provide resources, and the community provides legitimacy, but schools must constantly negotiate among these sources of authority. Their autonomy exists, but it is limited by regulatory requirements, financial dependency, and local expectations.

Therefore, governance in Khmer Muslim Islamic education should be understood as negotiated authority. Islamic schools are not fully controlled by the state, nor are they entirely autonomous community institutions. They operate through a hybrid structure in which institutional survival depends on the ability to mediate between formal regulation, religious legitimacy, parental trust, and donor influence.

3.1.3 Islamic Education as a Glocalized Practice of Identity Reconstruction

The third major finding shows that Islamic education functions as a central site of identity reconstruction among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia. Participants did not describe Islamic schools only as places for teaching religious texts. They described them as spaces where children learn collective memory, moral conduct, religious belonging, and their place within Cambodian society.

This role must be understood in relation to the historical rupture experienced by Muslim communities during the Khmer Rouge period. The destruction of religious institutions and interruption of Islamic knowledge transmission created a long-term concern about generational continuity. In this context, Islamic schools became spaces where the community attempted to rebuild what had been lost.

One religious leader explained:

"Our parents' generation experienced a time when religion could not be practiced openly. Many teachers disappeared, and many children grew up without proper Islamic learning. Now, when we teach Qur'an and Islamic manners, we are not only teaching lessons. We are reconnecting the children with what was broken." (RL2, religious leader, July 2023)

This statement demonstrates that Islamic education is closely linked to memory and recovery. Teaching Qur'an, prayer, and Islamic ethics was understood not only as routine religious instruction, but also as a form of communal repair. Schools helped restore continuity between generations and re-establish religious knowledge as a living tradition.

In everyday school life, identity reconstruction occurred through repeated practices: Qur'anic recitation, Arabic reading, moral advice, collective prayer, stories about Muslim life, and the discipline of respectful behaviour. These practices created a moral environment in which children learned what it meant to be Muslim within a predominantly non-Muslim national context.

One teacher described this process:

"Children learn from small things. They learn how to greet, how to respect parents, how to pray, how to speak politely, and how to remember Allah in daily life. These are not only classroom lessons. They become habits. This is how the school shapes identity." (T4, teacher, August 2023)

This quote provides a more grounded understanding of identity formation. Identity was not transmitted only through formal curriculum, but through everyday routines and embodied practices. The school functioned as a moral environment where religious belonging was learned through repetition, discipline, and social interaction.

At the same time, Islamic education did not position Muslim identity against Cambodian national belonging. Participants frequently emphasised that students should become both committed Muslims

and responsible Cambodian citizens. This dual aspiration is central to the glocalized character of Islamic education in this context.

One administrator stated:

"We do not teach children to separate themselves from Cambodia. They are Cambodian, and they must understand the country, the language, and the law. But they are also Muslims, so they must know their religion. The two should go together." (SA1, school administrator, July 2023)

This statement challenges the assumption that identity-based education necessarily produces separation or resistance to national integration. For participants, Islamic education was a way of enabling students to participate in national life without abandoning religious identity. It created a form of belonging that was local and national, religious and civic.

The glocalized nature of Islamic education was also visible in how global educational discourses were interpreted. Concepts such as quality education, skills development, and student achievement were not rejected. However, they were redefined through Islamic moral priorities. Quality education was not understood only as academic performance, but also as the formation of ethical character and responsibility to the community.

A community education activist explained:

"When people say 'quality education,' sometimes they mean test results or jobs. Of course, those are important. But for our community, quality also means good character, respect, faith, and responsibility. A clever child without morality is not considered successful." (CEA3, community education activist, September 2023)

This quote shows that global education language was locally reinterpreted. The community did not simply absorb external definitions of quality, inclusion, or development. Instead, these ideas were translated into a religious and communal framework. This process is at the heart of glocalization: global and national educational expectations were adopted selectively and reshaped according to local values.

However, this process was not free from constraint. Participants recognised that the ability to preserve Islamic identity while pursuing national inclusion depended on resources, trained teachers, parental support, and policy flexibility. Schools with stronger leadership and better resources were more capable of balancing religious and national demands, while weaker institutions experienced more pressure and compromise.

One teacher expressed this concern:

"The idea of teaching both religion and national subjects is good, but not every school has enough teachers. Some teachers are strong in religion but not trained in general subjects. Others know general subjects but cannot teach Islamic knowledge. We need teachers who understand both worlds." (T6, teacher, September 2023)

This statement connects identity reconstruction with institutional capacity. The success of glocalized Islamic education depends not only on community commitment, but also on practical conditions such as teacher training, curriculum resources, and sustainable governance. Thus, Islamic education among Khmer Muslims operates as a glocalized practice of identity reconstruction. It preserves religious memory, rebuilds communal belonging, and prepares students for participation in national society. Yet this process is shaped by unequal power relations and material constraints. Local actors exercise agency, but their agency is conditioned by state policy, donor support, community expectations, and institutional limitations.

3.1.4 Synthesis of Findings

Taken together, the findings show that Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia is neither a closed religious system nor a fully assimilated component of national schooling. It is a negotiated educational practice shaped by the interaction of curriculum, governance, and identity. First, curriculum integration reflects strategic adaptation. Islamic schools adopt selected elements of the national curriculum to secure recognition and student mobility, but they maintain religious instruction as the foundation of institutional identity. Second, governance is hybrid and negotiated.

Schools operate between state regulation, community authority, parental expectations, and donor influence. Third, Islamic education functions as a site of identity reconstruction. It helps restore religious knowledge, collective memory, and moral belonging after historical disruption.

These findings refine the concept of glocalization by showing that local adaptation is not always smooth, equal, or freely chosen. In the Khmer Muslim context, glocalization is shaped by asymmetrical power relations. Islamic educational actors negotiate external demands while trying to preserve community values, but their choices are constrained by recognition requirements, limited resources, donor dependency, and teacher capacity.

Therefore, glocalization in minority Islamic education should be understood not as seamless integration, but as strategic negotiation under constraint. Islamic education enables Khmer Muslim communities to pursue inclusion within the national system while maintaining religious continuity and communal identity in a post-conflict society.

3.2 Discussion

This study examined how Islamic education among Khmer Muslims in post-conflict Cambodia is shaped through processes of glocalization, situated between the demands of national integration, community-based religious identity, and global educational influences. The findings demonstrate that Islamic education in this context does not operate as a fully autonomous religious system, nor is it simply absorbed into the national education framework. Rather, it functions as a negotiated and adaptive educational practice through which minority communities selectively engage with state requirements and global discourses while preserving religious knowledge, collective memory, and communal identity.

The central theoretical contribution of this study lies in refining the concept of glocalization. Existing discussions of glocalization in education have emphasised how global educational norms are interpreted, adapted, and reworked within local contexts (Carney, 2020; Tikly, 2019). Such perspectives are useful because they challenge linear models of policy transfer and recognise the creative role of local actors in shaping educational change. However, the findings of this study suggest that, in post-conflict minority contexts, glocalization cannot be understood merely as a creative or balanced interaction between global and local forces. Rather, it must be analysed as a process shaped by structural constraint, unequal authority, and contested recognition.

This study therefore extends the literature on glocalization by showing that local agency is real but not unrestricted. Khmer Muslim educational actors actively decide which elements of the national curriculum to adopt, how religious instruction should be preserved, how donor-supported programmes should be interpreted, and how schools should maintain legitimacy among parents and religious leaders. However, these decisions are made under conditions of state regulation, limited resources, uneven teacher capacity, and dependency on external support. In this sense, the findings support and extend critiques of global education policy transfer that caution against overly optimistic assumptions about local agency (Steiner-Khamsi, 2021; Dryden-Peterson et al., 2020). Glocalization in this case is not simply a space of empowerment; it is also a space of negotiation, compromise, and vulnerability.

To clarify this contribution, this study conceptualizes curriculum integration as a strategic adaptation. Strategic adaptation refers to the selective and purposeful adjustment of institutional practices by minority educational actors in response to external demands, without fully abandoning their core epistemological, religious, and identity commitments. In this study, Islamic schools adopt selected components of the national curriculum to secure recognition, certification, and student mobility. At the same time, they maintain Qur'anic learning, Arabic literacy, Islamic moral formation, and religious instruction as the foundation of schooling. This adaptation is strategic because it is neither passive compliance nor complete resistance. It is a deliberate institutional response to the dual pressure of national inclusion and religious continuity.

The concept of strategic adaptation modifies dominant understandings of glocalization in two ways. First, it shows that adaptation is not always a sign of equal exchange between global and local forces. In the Cambodian case, adaptation is shaped by the need for institutional survival and formal

recognition. Second, it shows that local actors do not simply translate global or national policies into local forms; they also decide how far such policies can be accepted without weakening the moral and religious foundations of the institution. This finding challenges interpretations of glocalization that frame local adaptation primarily as creative appropriation. In minority and post-conflict contexts, adaptation may also be a survival strategy under unequal conditions.

The findings also contribute to debates on minority education by conceptualising Islamic education as a governance practice rather than merely a pedagogical arrangement. Previous research has highlighted the role of education in addressing inequality, recognition, and inclusion (McCowan, 2021; Merry, 2016). However, the Cambodian case shows that inclusion is not produced only through formal policy frameworks. It is enacted through everyday negotiations involving state authorities, school administrators, teachers, religious leaders, parents, and donors. This supports emerging perspectives on education governance that emphasise the interpretation and reshaping of policy at the local level (Carney, 2020; Dryden-Peterson, 2021).

In this regard, the study introduces the concept of negotiated inclusion. Negotiated inclusion refers to a form of educational participation in which minority institutions gain access to national recognition, resources, and legitimacy through continuous bargaining over curriculum, authority, identity, and institutional autonomy. Inclusion is therefore not simply granted by the state, nor is it achieved automatically through curriculum alignment. Instead, it is produced through ongoing negotiation between minority communities and the broader political, educational, and development structures in which they are embedded.

Negotiated inclusion helps explain why formal integration does not necessarily produce substantive equity. In the Cambodian case, Islamic schools may gain recognition by adopting national curriculum elements, but this recognition remains partial because the national system does not fully accommodate the epistemological and religious dimensions of Islamic education. Similarly, donor support may strengthen institutional capacity, but it can also introduce external accountability frameworks and dependency. Community authority may protect religious legitimacy, but it can also constrain pedagogical innovation and professional development. Thus, inclusion is ambivalent: it provides access and recognition while also reproducing forms of constraint.

This finding challenges policy approaches that equate inclusion with standardisation. International education agendas often promote universal benchmarks, accountability indicators, and curriculum alignment as pathways to equity (Menashy, 2021; Zapp & Ramirez, 2020). However, the findings of this study suggest that such approaches may produce formal inclusion without substantive recognition, particularly for minority communities in post-conflict settings. For Khmer Muslim Islamic education, meaningful inclusion requires more than access to the national system. It requires recognition of religious knowledge, flexible curriculum arrangements, and governance mechanisms that treat minority communities as active partners rather than passive recipients of policy.

The study also extends discussions of post-conflict education by showing that Islamic education plays a dual role in reconstruction. In line with research on education in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, the findings show that schooling can function as a space for rebuilding social cohesion, restoring cultural continuity, and addressing the legacies of historical disruption (Shah & Lopes Cardozo, 2020; Unterhalter, 2021). For Khmer Muslims, Islamic education contributes to the re-establishment of religious knowledge and communal identity following the rupture caused by the Khmer Rouge period. However, the findings also complicate narratives that portray identity-based education as inherently emancipatory. While Islamic education strengthens collective identity and moral continuity, it may also limit opportunities for pedagogical innovation when community expectations strongly favour traditional models of instruction.

This ambivalence aligns with recent debates on identity, belonging, and social transformation in education (Novelli et al., 2021; Rahman, 2023). The Cambodian case demonstrates that identity-based education should not be understood as either oppositional to national integration or automatically liberating for minority communities. Instead, Islamic education performs a dual function: it enables students to participate in the national system while reinforcing community-based religious belonging.

This dual function is central to negotiated inclusion because it shows that minority education can support national participation without erasing religious identity.

The findings further show that glocalization does not always produce balanced hybridity. The hybrid governance of Islamic education among Khmer Muslims emerges from unequal relations among the state, community actors, and donors. The state holds formal authority over recognition and curriculum standards; donors shape institutional development through funding, training, and reporting mechanisms; and community leaders provide moral legitimacy and local trust. These actors interact within the same educational field, but they do not possess equal power. As a result, the hybrid character of Islamic education is not simply a harmonious blending of different influences. It is a negotiated arrangement shaped by asymmetrical authority and resource dependency.

This insight supports calls for more context-sensitive and pluralistic approaches to education governance (Barakat & Milton, 2020; Verger et al., 2021; Menashy & Shields, 2022). Rather than imposing uniform standards, policy frameworks should allow differentiated forms of integration that recognise the legitimacy of diverse knowledge systems. In the Cambodian case, this would require flexible curriculum policies; teacher training that supports both religious and national educational competencies, and co-governance arrangements that include minority communities in decision-making. Such approaches are necessary because minority education cannot be made inclusive through standardisation alone.

Finally, the Cambodian case contributes to broader comparative discussions on minority education in Southeast Asia and beyond. Similar dynamics of negotiation between integration and identity can be observed in other post-conflict or minority contexts, such as Myanmar, Southern Thailand, and Mindanao (Musa, 2020; Rahman, 2023). However, the Cambodian experience highlights the specific importance of post-genocide reconstruction, religious knowledge recovery, and long-term donor involvement in shaping educational trajectories. This suggests that theories of glocalization must be historically situated. The meaning of local adaptation depends not only on cultural context, but also on histories of violence, institutional rupture, recognition politics, and resource dependency.

In sum, this study advances glocalization theory by showing that glocalization in post-conflict minority Islamic education is best understood through the concepts of strategic adaptation and negotiated inclusion. Strategic adaptation explains how minority institutions selectively adjust to national and global demands while preserving core religious and communal commitments. Negotiated inclusion explains how minority communities gain partial access to recognition, resources, and national participation while continuing to contest the terms of that inclusion. Together, these concepts move the analysis beyond the general claim that global and local forces interact. They show that glocalization is structured by power, history, identity, and institutional vulnerability. More broadly, the study highlights the need to rethink global education policy frameworks in ways that move beyond standardisation toward more inclusive, flexible, and contextually grounded approaches.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that Islamic education operates as a dynamic and adaptive practice rather than a marginal or oppositional subsystem. Curriculum integration is implemented selectively as a strategy for institutional survival, governance is enacted through hybrid arrangements involving state, community, and donors, and educational practices function as a key site of identity reconstruction in the post-conflict context. This study underscores that Islamic education in post-conflict minority contexts should be understood as a process of negotiation rather than integration alone. Recognising this complexity is essential for developing more equitable, inclusive, and contextually grounded education policies in an increasingly globalised yet unequal world.

Theoretically, this study contributes to globalization theory, particularly the concept of glocalization, by demonstrating that it is not a neutral or balanced process of global-local interaction. Instead, glocalization in this context involves strategic negotiation under asymmetrical power relations, where local actors exercise agency within structural constraints. This finding refines existing interpretations that emphasise local adaptability by foregrounding the limits and conditions under which such adaptation occurs. In addition, the study contributes to minority education research by

conceptualising Islamic education as a governance practice shaped by multi-layered authority, rather than solely as a pedagogical system. It also advances post-conflict education studies by highlighting how educational institutions function simultaneously as mechanisms of reconstruction, identity formation, and negotiated inclusion. From a policy perspective, the findings indicate that inclusive education for minority communities cannot be achieved through standardisation alone. While integration into national systems provides formal recognition and access, it often fails to accommodate the epistemological and cultural dimensions of minority education. Policymakers should therefore move beyond uniform frameworks toward context-sensitive and flexible approaches that recognise plural knowledge systems and support differentiated models of integration. This includes developing adaptable curriculum policies, investing in teacher training with dual competencies, and fostering co-governance arrangements that involve minority communities as active partners rather than passive recipients. Such approaches are essential for achieving substantive, rather than symbolic, inclusion in post-conflict and culturally diverse settings.

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