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## Equality in Islam: Prophetic Traditions, Islamic Educational Perspectives, and Multicultural Democracy in Southeast Asia

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### Abstract

**Objective:** Examining the conflict between traditional interpretations and modern readings, this study explores how Islamic doctrines and prophetic traditions influence Southeast Asian Muslim communities' conceptions of equality. The goal is to examine how social, economic, and gender equality are framed in pluralistic cultural contexts using Hadith and Qur'anic teaching. **Theoretical framework:** The study is grounded in Islamic jurisprudence, ethics, and social theory, exploring how classical sources interact with modern interpretations to inform notions of justice, human dignity, and communal harmony. The framework situates these interpretations within ongoing debates about tradition, reform, and socio-religious adaptation in Southeast Asia. **Literature review:** While modern scholarship increasingly focuses on gender justice, economic justice, and interreligious tolerance, earlier research emphasizes the emphasis of ancient Islamic scriptures on spiritual and community equality. This study fills a gap in the literature by combining field observations and textual analysis in a Southeast Asian environment. **Method:** This study employs a qualitative, field-based methodology that combines interviews with Islamic scholars, educators, and community leaders with observations made in madrasahs, pesantrens, and places of worship. **Results:** The results show that Muslims in Southeast Asia are actively discussing what equality means, striking a balance between modern social realities and devotion to traditional prophetic traditions. While traditional readings continue to influence cultural and spiritual standards, contemporary reinterpretations highlight gender justice, economic parity, and interreligious tolerance as key topics. **Implications:** In order to promote more inclusive and egalitarian Muslim societies, the study emphasizes the possibilities of fusing classic Islamic sources with contemporary social imperatives. The findings of this study can help religious leaders, educators, and legislators advance social justice and human dignity. **Novelty:** The comparative, field-based methodology of the study, which combines Hadith analysis, Islamic theory, and empirical observations in Southeast Asia, is innovative. It offers a practical framework for comprehending equality in modern Muslim situations.

**Keywords:** equality in islam, prophetic traditions, multicultural, democracy, islamic education theory.

## INTRODUCTION

Islamic teachings place a strong emphasis on equality, which is highlighted in both the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (Hadith). Islam maintains that all believers, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or status, are equal before Allah; this idea is amply demonstrated in several Hadith and the Prophet Muhammad's Farewell Sermon. However, in reality, there are frequently conflicts between these ideals and experienced realities in Muslim countries. The Hadith on equality is applied in a variety of ways in Southeast Asia, where Islam coexists with other cultures and religions [1]. The fight for equal access to education and gender equity is still being discussed in public in Malaysia and Indonesia. In Brunei, the state's Islamic welfare policies are frequently used to frame economic equality [2]. Interreligious coexistence in Singapore and Southern Thailand demonstrates how Muslims use Hadith interpretation to foster tolerance in heterogeneous communities. These facts highlight how urgent it is to revisit equality in Islam using Islamic theories and Prophetic traditions [3].

Prior research has examined various aspects of equality in Islam, frequently concentrating on particular topics. Others have emphasized the significance of zakat and waqf in tackling economic injustice, while others have examined gender relations and the roles of women in Muslim society. Others have looked into the Islamic concept of justice for non-Muslims and interfaith interactions [4]. Even if these studies make significant contributions, the majority are still restricted to a single topic or country. There hasn't been enough development of a comparative and thorough approach that incorporates Hadith, Islamic doctrines, and the complex reality of Southeast Asian nations.

This study closes that gap by taking a comprehensive approach to Islamic equality. It blends field-based knowledge from Southeast Asian contexts, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore, with Islamic theoretical frameworks and Prophetic traditions [5]. The study demonstrates the dynamic interaction between traditional Islamic teachings and the difficulties of contemporary societies by looking at how equality is understood, negotiated, and implemented in various cultural and political contexts. This study sheds insight into how Muslims in Southeast Asia construe equality in a variety of contexts, including social, economic, and interreligious, in contrast to earlier works that had a more limited focus. This study's main contention is that equality in Islam, which has its roots in Prophetic traditions and is expanded upon by Islamic doctrines, is always being reinterpreted. Persistent reinterpretations in Southeast Asia demonstrate the survival of conventional interpretations as well as the rise of fresh viewpoints that address modern realities. The study argues that, while staying rooted in the timeless authority of Hadith and Islamic theoretical underpinnings, recent developments in Muslim cultures in Southeast Asia are redefining discourses on equality by emphasizing inclusivity, justice, and pluralism [6].

Scholars from a wide range of fields, including sociology, anthropology, jurisprudence, and theology, have extensively examined the Islamic concept of equality. A large body of research highlights how the Qur'an and Hadith repeatedly emphasize humanity's unity and the need for justice in all interpersonal relationships [7]. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, and no white is superior to a black, unless they are pious and perform good deeds, according to the Prophet Muhammad's Farewell Sermon, which is sometimes recognized as the founding statement of equality. Generations of Muslim academics and reformers have been motivated by this teaching to emphasize the universality of Islamic equality [8].

In Muslim societies, gender equality has been the focus of a substantial amount of research. Research highlights that women's responsibilities, educational opportunities, and leadership involvement continue to be important markers of the practical application of Islamic teachings on equality. Feminist scholars have emphasized how Hadith-based interpretations are being reexamined in Indonesia and Malaysia to protect women's rights in areas of family law, education, and employment. These discussions are ongoing, with conservative organizations supporting conventional gender hierarchies and reformist movements calling for more inclusive interpretations of Prophetic traditions [9]. The region is a crucial location for

researching how equality is reinterpreted via religious and cultural negotiations because of these divergent viewpoints, which highlight the dynamic contestations among Muslim communities in Southeast Asia.

Another body of research examines economic equality, specifically as it relates to the Islamic zakat and waqf institutions [10]. Scholars have demonstrated that these systems are intended to promote social justice and solidarity in addition to income redistribution. For example, state-run Islamic welfare programs in Brunei have been seen as an expression of the Hadith's emphasis on caring for the weak and sharing responsibility. The institutionalization of zakat in Malaysia and Indonesia has also been compared, and the results indicate that although formal mechanisms have helped with distribution, there are still issues with maintaining transparency and reaching underserved populations. These studies show that although Islamic economic principles provide a strong basis for equality, structural and political barriers frequently prevent them from being implemented in practice [11].

Scholarly interest has also been drawn to interfaith interactions and the issue of religious equality, particularly in the setting of multicultural Southeast Asian society. Muslims in Singapore, for instance, use Prophetic traditions to encourage harmony with religious minorities and advance equality through interreligious discussion [12]. Implementing Islamic principles of justice and equality toward non-Muslims presents both opportunities and obstacles in Southern Thailand, where Muslims live as a minority amid political unrest. These incidents highlight the fact that equality in Islam encompasses the broader idea of fairness across religious and cultural divides and goes beyond gender and economics [13].

Notwithstanding these significant contributions, the literature currently available frequently concentrates on a particular aspect, such as gender, the economy, or interfaith relations, without incorporating them into a comprehensive framework. Additionally, a large portion of the scholarship is still country-specific, which restricts the ability to draw comparisons across Southeast Asia. There is also a lack of a thorough methodology that links Islamic theoretical frameworks, Prophetic traditions, and the many realities of Southeast Asian countries [14]. By placing the debate of equality within a more comprehensive analytical framework that recognizes the interdependence of social, economic, and religious aspects, this study aims to close those gaps.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly discussions on equality in Islam have long centered on the normative foundations of the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions, emphasizing the intrinsic dignity and moral equality of all human beings before God. Classical Islamic sources consistently affirm that piety (taqwā), rather than ethnicity, gender, or social status, is the primary measure of human worth. Early jurists and theologians articulated equality mainly in ethical and spiritual terms, framing it within broader concepts of justice (ʿadl), balance, and communal responsibility. However, these classical formulations often allowed for contextual differentiation in social roles, which later became a point of debate in modern interpretations [14].

Contemporary Islamic scholarship has increasingly revisited these foundational texts in response to modern challenges, including gender inequality, economic disparity, and pluralistic governance. Reformist thinkers argue that equality should be understood not only as spiritual parity but also as social and legal equity, compatible with universal human rights and democratic values. Studies in Islamic social theory highlight how principles such as public interest (maṣlahah), prevention of harm, and ethical objectives of the law (maqāṣid al-sharīʿah) provide interpretive tools for rethinking equality in changing socio-political contexts [15].

Research on prophetic traditions reveals both egalitarian impulses and apparent tensions. On one hand, Hadith literature underscores compassion, mutual respect, and social justice; on the other hand, certain narrations have been historically interpreted to justify hierarchical structures. Recent academic debates focus on contextual and methodological readings of Hadith, stressing historical circumstances, transmission analysis, and ethical coherence with

Qur'anic values. This approach has opened space for reinterpretations that emphasize gender justice, economic fairness, and inclusivity without rejecting the authority of tradition [16].

In Southeast Asia, existing literature highlights the region's distinctive engagement with Islam in multicultural and democratic settings. Scholars note that Muslim societies in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore negotiate Islamic norms alongside diverse religious communities and modern state frameworks. Studies emphasize local traditions, educational institutions, and civil society as key arenas where concepts of equality are debated and practiced. Nevertheless, much of this literature remains either textually focused or sociologically descriptive, rarely integrating both dimensions [17].

**Table 1. Literature Review on Equality in Islam**

| Focus Area                | Key Scholarly Insights  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Classical Islamic Sources | Emphasize spiritual equality, moral responsibility, and human dignity rooted in the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions |
| Prophetic Traditions      | Highlight ethical egalitarianism while allowing contextual differentiation in social roles                          |
| Islamic Jurisprudence     | Interprets equality through justice ( <i>'adl</i> ), public welfare ( <i>maṣlaḥah</i> ), and legal balance          |
| Modern Islamic Thought    | Reexamines gender justice, economic equity, and human rights within contemporary contexts                           |
| Southeast Asian Context   | Demonstrates adaptive interpretations shaped by multiculturalism and democratic values                              |
| Research Gap              | Limited integration of textual analysis with empirical field studies  |
| Contribution              | Combines Islamic theory and lived practice to explain evolving notions of equality in plural societies              |

This study builds on and extends existing scholarship by combining classical Islamic theory, Prophetic traditions, and empirical field observations in Southeast Asia. By bridging normative teachings with lived experiences, it contributes a more holistic understanding of how equality in Islam is interpreted, contested, and rearticulated within contemporary multicultural democracies [18].

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative field research methodology to examine how Southeast Asians understand and apply the Islamic concept of equality, which is expressed in the Hadith and Islamic ideas. The approach was selected because it enables a thorough examination of social realities, cultural interpretations, and lived experiences that are not possible with just textual analysis. The study seeks to close the gap between normative standards and modern actions by fusing field-based observations with classical Islamic literature [19].

In several Southeast Asian nations, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore, data were gathered using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. Religious scholars, community leaders, educators, and regular Muslims who actively participate in equality-related conversations or activities were among the participants. Themes including interfaith harmony, economic redistribution, and gender justice were discussed in the interviews. To document the contextual manifestations of equality in day-to-day life, observations were made in mosques, Islamic educational institutions, and community groups [20].

Textual examination of Hadith, Qur'anic commentary, and recent Islamic theoretical works that discuss the principle of equality were also included in the study. By combining textual analysis with empirical data, this dual approach guarantees that the research covers both the theological underpinnings and the real-world applications of equality in Islam. To find recurring trends, parallels, and distinctions among the chosen nations, data were classified thematically [21].

Participants' anonymity, informed consent, and observance of regional religious and cultural customs were all strictly adhered to as ethical principles. The methodology offers a thorough framework for comprehending how Muslims in Southeast Asia negotiate and reinterpret the principle of equality in various settings by firmly establishing the study in both traditional Islamic teachings and field realities.

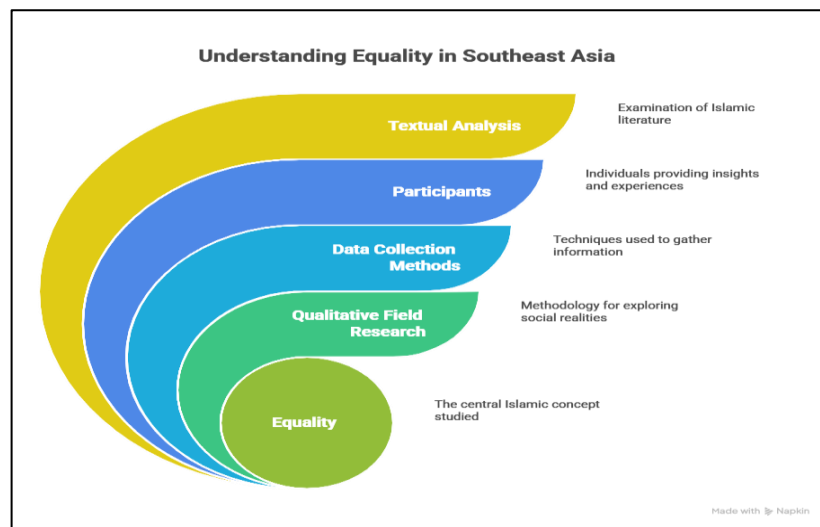


Figure 1. Understanding Equality in Southeast Asia

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Evolving Interpretations of Equality

According to a field study conducted in Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, and Singapore, Muslims generally acknowledge equality as a fundamental Islamic value that has its roots in both Prophetic traditions and Qur'anic principles. The well-known quotes from the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) that emphasize the spiritual and moral equality of all people, "No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab superior to an Arab," and "Adam was made of dust, and all of you are from Adam" were often cited by participants from a variety of backgrounds. Regardless of color, culture, or social standing, these teachings served to uphold the fundamental dignity of every individual [22].

However, there were significant differences in how these Hadith were interpreted and applied in different institutions and situations, especially between reformist educators and traditional scholars. These Hadith are typically interpreted by traditional Islamic scholars using a classical framework based on Sufi teachings (tasawwuf) and jurisprudence (fiqh), particularly by those who teach in madrasahs and pesantrens in more conservative areas. Their understanding of equality is mainly spiritual, stressing that piety (taqwa) is the real test of a person's value and that all believers are equal before God. This interpretation frequently upholds the notions of religious hierarchy, brotherhood among Muslims, and social cohesion, where certain roles, particularly those of gender, are viewed as divinely mandated and therefore unchangeable [23].

On the other hand, an increasing number of reformist academics and educators are creating more expansive and socially conscious readings of these same Hadith, especially younger generations who have been schooled in interdisciplinary Islamic studies such as gender studies and human rights. These individuals frequently use a contextual approach to reinterpret ancient texts, taking into account historical context, societal development, and the greater goals of Islamic law (maqāsid al-sharī'ah). They contend that inclusive citizenship, economic redistribution, and gender fairness are all supported by the spirit of prophetic traditions. Reformist scholars, for example, stress the moral lesson of justice and respect for one another that is ingrained in the Prophet's general treatment of women and marginalized groups, as

opposed to interpreting Hadith about women's responsibilities in ways that limit their agency [24].

In more urbanized and heterogeneous nations like Singapore and Malaysia, where Muslims must engage within multireligious frameworks, these reformist interpretations are especially prevalent. Hadith are frequently cited in similar situations to advocate for anti-discrimination legislation, interfaith cooperation, and civic inclusion. Similarly, reform-minded voices in Indonesia use Prophetic traditions as moral instruments to push for change, highlighting issues like gender-based injustice and economic disparity as issues that Islamic teachings must actively confront. Although institutional interpretations are still more conservative in countries like Brunei and parts of Malaysia, where Islam is the official state religion, grassroots reformist initiatives are becoming more and more influential [25].

Despite the progressive momentum, the study also found evidence of tension between these newer interpretations and more conservative teachings. Reformist scholars often face resistance when challenging entrenched gender roles or addressing minority rights, especially in areas where religious authority is tightly regulated. Nonetheless, the trend suggests that the Hadith literature is not being rejected or sidelined, but rather actively engaged with, re-contextualized, and reinterpreted to align with present-day realities. This dynamic process reflects how Southeast Asian Muslims are creatively negotiating their religious traditions in a rapidly changing world while striving to uphold the core Islamic ideal of equality [26].

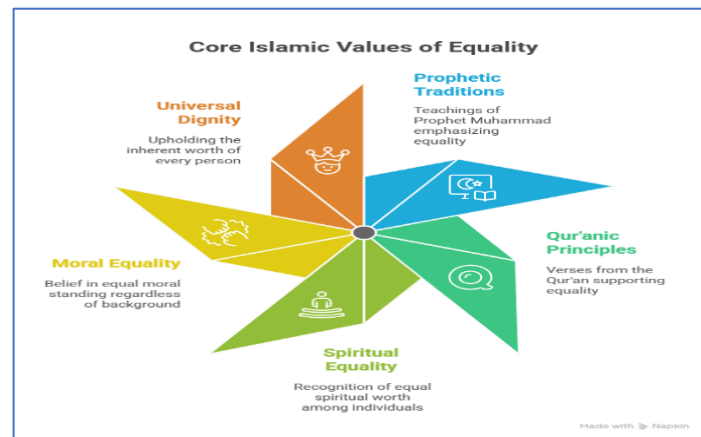


Figure 2. Core Islamic Values of Equality

### Gender Justice as a Central Theme

Gender justice was one of the study's most important subjects, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia, where lively debates over the place and function of women in Islam are changing the way that people talk about religion. Participants often referenced Hadith literature while discussing the moral underpinnings of gender equality. However, the interpretations they used frequently diverged greatly from conventional interpretations, indicating a growing desire for approaches to Islamic scriptures that are contextual and justice-focused [27].

Reinterpreting Hadith that have historically been used to support male authority or female subjugation was evident in numerous field locations, especially urban Islamic institutions, civil society organizations, and progressive pesantrens in Java. Female academics and teachers were instrumental in this intellectual and societal change. In order to make the case that many limiting readings were the result of patriarchal culture rather than the Prophetic message itself, they critically examined Prophetic traditions using techniques including historical contextualization, thematic analysis, and comparison with Qur'anic verses [28].

For instance, the Prophet's inclusive behavior toward women, such as consulting with female companions and recognizing their intelligence, agency, and moral integrity, was taken into consideration while reexamining Hadith that have been used to exclude women from

positions of public or religious leadership. These academics stressed in both public lectures and classroom settings that the Prophet Muhammad exemplified an ideal of equality and respect, promoting women's active involvement in social service, education, religious life, and even politics [29].

Teachers were seen incorporating this changing conversation into their curricula in pesantrens throughout Java. They urged pupils to think on the complementary nature of male and female contributions to society rather than restating traditionalist ideas of gender roles as rigid and hierarchical. This did not always result in a complete acceptance of Western feminist concepts, but rather in an Islamic understanding of gender-neutral *rahmah* (compassion) and *adl* (justice). To reconcile gender justice with the Prophetic objective of eradicating oppression and advancing dignity for all believers, regardless of sex, teachers often presented gender justice as a moral imperative within Islam.

However, the movement is not without its challenges. In more conservative circles, especially in rural areas or institutions closely aligned with official state religious authorities, resistance to these reinterpretations remains strong. Some respondents expressed concerns that feminist readings of Hadith threaten to destabilize family values or introduce foreign ideologies into Islamic teaching. Despite this, the growing body of female-led scholarship and youth-led discussions suggests a significant cultural and theological shift underway, with Southeast Asian Muslim communities increasingly embracing gender justice not as an import, but as a legitimate and necessary expression of Islamic ethics [30].



Figure 3. Pesantren Hajjah Nuriyyah Shabran in Central Java

### **Economic Equality and Zakat-Based Redistribution**

In Brunei and Malaysia, participants strongly connected the institution of zakat and charitable giving with Islamic beliefs of equality, making economic justice a prominent issue. To demonstrate that Islam views wealth redistribution as a social and spiritual duty, many referenced Hadith that emphasize the wealthy's moral need to help the poor, such as "He is not a believer who sleeps satisfied while his neighbor goes hungry" [31].

Community leaders in Brunei, where zakat is centrally managed by the government, spoke of a system that is structured but dynamic. While conventional distribution concentrates on providing short-term assistance to the impoverished and destitute, there is a rising awareness of the need to move toward long-term empowerment through programs like vocational training, microenterprise finance, and education support. These modifications are motivated by both pragmatic concerns about reducing poverty and moral lessons from the Hadith [32].

Zakat institutions in Malaysia are progressively eschewing the charity model, especially in metropolitan areas. Reformist academics and young professionals favor development-focused initiatives financed by zakat. These include entrepreneurship for low-income families, job services, and skill development. Transparency and technology are also becoming more

significant; some organizations are using online tools to track and improve the distribution and collection of zakat [33].

Participants did, however, identify difficulties like lengthy bureaucratic processes, low public awareness, and a propensity among certain Muslims to see zakat as a bare legal requirement rather than a more comprehensive moral commitment. Reform-minded voices are still working to reframe zakat as a vehicle for justice rather than merely charity by reeducating communities about Hadith and Islamic ethics [34].

All things considered, zakat in Southeast Asia is evolving from a ceremonial duty to a calculated tool for achieving economic equality, representing a contemporary interpretation of the teachings of the Prophet in accordance with the conditions of modern Muslim cultures.

**Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Islamic Equality, Gender Justice, and Economic Redistribution in Southeast Asia**

| Theme   | Key Findings  | Context / Countries                              | Actors / Participants  | Notes / Observations   |
|---|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Evolving Interpretations of Equality</b>             | Muslims recognize equality as a core Islamic value rooted in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Hadith emphasize moral and spiritual equality: "No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, nor is a non-Arab superior to an Arab," and "Adam was made of dust, and all of you are from Adam." | Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Singapore | Traditional scholars, reformist educators, students, and community members                     | Traditional scholars focus on spiritual equality and social cohesion; reformists adopt contextual readings emphasizing inclusive citizenship, economic fairness, and social justice. Urban areas show stronger reformist interpretations. Tensions exist between conservative and progressive interpretations, but the Hadith are actively reinterpreted for modern realities. |
| <b>Gender Justice</b>                                   | Gender justice is a central concern; Hadith are reinterpreted to challenge patriarchal readings. Emphasis on women's agency, education, leadership, and participation in social/religious life.   | Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei                      | Female academics, educators, progressive pesantrens, civil society organizations               | Reformist interpretations promote equality using the Prophet's example of consulting women and respecting their intelligence. Curriculum changes in pesantrens encourage students to view male/female roles as complementary. Resistance exists in conservative areas, but female-led and youth-led initiatives are driving gradual change.                                    |
| <b>Economic Equality and Zakat-Based Redistribution</b> | Zakat and charitable giving are linked to Islamic principles of economic justice. Redistribution evolving from charity to development-focused,  | Brunei, Malaysia                                 | Government zakat institutions, community leaders, reformist academics, and young professionals | Brunei implements structured, centrally managed zakat; Malaysia emphasizes entrepreneurship, skills training, and technology for transparency. Challenges include bureaucracy, low awareness, and a narrow understanding of zakat as a   |

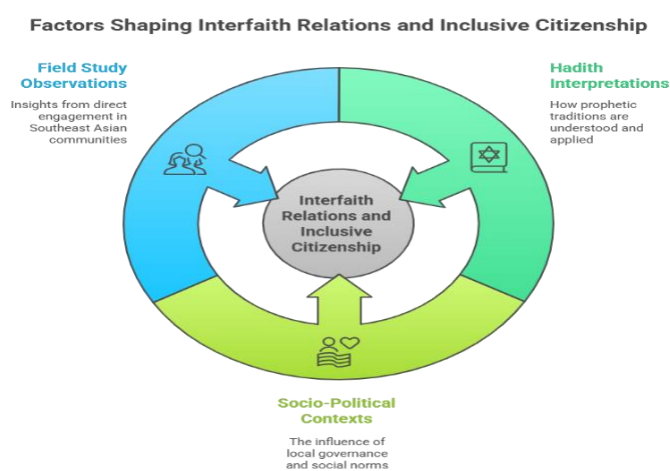
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|  | empowerment initiatives. |  |  | legal duty rather than a moral commitment. Zakat is increasingly seen as a tool for justice, reflecting the contemporary application of Hadith. |
|--|--------------------------|--|--|---|

### Interfaith Relations and Inclusive Citizenship

The function of Hadith in fostering interfaith harmony and inclusive citizenship is another important finding from the field study, particularly in religiously diverse areas like Singapore, Thailand, and portions of Indonesia. Participants emphasized prophetic sayings that emphasize justice, peace, and the dignity of every human being, regardless of faith, especially those involved in civil society activity and interfaith engagement. One Hadith that was often brought up in these conversations was:

“On the Day of Judgment, I am the enemy of whoever harms a dhimmi, a non-Muslim protected by Muslims.”

Reformist academics and activists read this Hadith and others as proof of the Prophet's dedication to racial harmony and fair treatment of minorities. For example, in Singapore, Muslim leaders engaged in state-sponsored interreligious forums applied these principles to promote mutual respect in public life and stronger legal protections for religious minorities.



**Figure 4. Factors Shaping Interfaith Relations and Inclusive Citizenship**

On the other hand, the same Hadith are either minimized or interpreted in a more exclusive context in more conservative areas or where religious orthodoxy is upheld by state processes, as Brunei and some Malaysian states. Although there is typically tolerance in this place, non-Muslims' citizenship rights and legal safeguards are sometimes seen through the prism of Islamic legal systems that distinguish Muslims from non-Muslims.

However, the field study shows that there is a rising recognition of the need to recast Hadith-based discourses to promote pluralism, particularly among young people and interfaith activists. Such inclusive readings, according to reform-minded responders, are based on the moral and universalistic aspects of Prophetic teachings rather than deviating from Islam. In Southeast Asia, this developing conversation is assisting in bridging the gap between contemporary civic principles and Islamic ethics [35].

### **Youth Engagement and Digital Hadith Literacy**

The study's findings about how younger generations interact with Hadith, particularly in digital contexts, were particularly intriguing. There is growing evidence of "digital Hadith literacy" in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Some respondents used this word to characterize the phenomena of young people using social media, mobile apps, and online platforms to access, understand, and discuss Prophetic traditions [36].

It has been noted that student associations, youth-led Islamic collectives, and influencers on social media sites like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok use Hadith to address current issues like gender roles, mental health, environmental ethics, and even political accountability in addition to promoting spiritual growth. These conversations frequently show how traditional respect for Hadith is combined with critical thinking and current relevance [37].

The widespread use of Hadith on compassion, humility, and reliability in mental health initiatives by Muslim youth organizations is one prominent example. To encourage discussions on emotional well-being, de-stigmatize mental illness, and foster empathy, hadith such as "God does not show mercy to those who do not show mercy to others" are being reinterpreted.

But there are drawbacks to this democratization of Hadith interpretation as well. Concerns regarding the selective or decontextualized use of Hadith online, which could result in misconceptions or cursory readings, were voiced by a few instructors. The dangers of avoiding scholarly vetting and ancient commentary were pointed out by traditional scholars. As a result, reformist educators are pushing media literacy more and more in tandem with Islamic education to give young people the skills they need to interact critically with digital religious information [38].

### **Intergenerational Dialogue and Communal Identity**

The study also shows how, in Muslim communities in Southeast Asia, Hadith involvement serves as a link between generations or perhaps a source of conflict. Older generations continue to identify Hadith mostly with moral behavior, ritual instruction, and the transfer of religious authority through established intellectual structures. Hadith is widely viewed by younger Muslims, especially those who are surrounded by digital cultures, as a tool for navigating contemporary identities and tackling global issues [39].

This has led to both peaceful and tense periods in family environments. Some parents were proud of their kids' use of Hadith to encourage compassion, fairness, and volunteerism. Some, however, were concerned that young people's readings lacked nuance, particularly when they were separated from traditional commentary. Thus, intergenerational discussions about Hadith reflect larger cultural debates between adaptation and preservation, continuity and change [40].

Remarkably, intergenerational study circles have been organized by community organizations in Malaysia and Singapore, where young people and seniors read Hadith together. Frequently, facilitators contextualize Prophetic traditions for both traditional and modern issues. These forums not only safeguard authenticity but also validate the voices of younger Muslims, affirming their role in shaping the future of Islamic discourse. The negotiation of Hadith across generations, therefore, highlights its dual role: as a transmitter of timeless values and as a living, dynamic resource that adapts to evolving social realities [41].

## Analysis

The findings of this study indicate that equality in Islam, as articulated through Prophetic traditions and Islamic theories, is a dynamic and negotiated concept shaped by social context, interpretive authority, and educational practice. Importantly, Islamic education (*tarbiyah islāmiyyah*) emerges as a central medium through which values of equality, justice, and human dignity are transmitted, contested, and reformulated in Southeast Asia. Hadith are not only theological references but also pedagogical tools that guide moral formation and social consciousness.

A key analytical insight lies in the tension between classical and reformist interpretive frameworks, particularly within Islamic educational institutions. Traditional scholars, especially those rooted in *madrasahs* and *pesantrens*, emphasize spiritual equality before God, cultivating values such as humility, piety (*taqwā*), obedience, and communal harmony. These values are foundational in Islamic education, reinforcing moral discipline and respect for religious authority. However, this approach often maintains differentiated social roles, especially regarding gender, which becomes a point of critique among reformist educators.

Reformist scholars and Islamic education practitioners adopt contextual and objectives-based approaches (*maqāsid al-sharī'ah*) in teaching Hadith and Islamic ethics. In this framework, Islamic education is oriented toward nurturing justice (*'adl*), compassion (*rahmah*), responsibility (*amānah*), and social inclusion. Equality is taught not only as a spiritual principle but also as a social ethic relevant to issues such as gender justice, economic fairness, and interreligious coexistence. This pedagogical shift demonstrates how Islamic education functions as a bridge between classical texts and contemporary realities, enabling learners to internalize equality as a lived value.

The Southeast Asian context further reinforces the educational dimension of equality. Multicultural and democratic environments encourage Islamic educational curricula that emphasize tolerance, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity. In countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore, Islamic education increasingly incorporates interfaith dialogue, ethical citizenship, and social justice as core learning outcomes, often grounded in Prophetic teachings. Hadith are thus used to cultivate inclusive attitudes and peaceful coexistence, aligning religious instruction with broader societal needs. Economic justice also reflects Islamic educational values. Teaching about *zakat* and charity in mosques, schools, and community programs frames redistribution as both a legal obligation and a moral lesson in solidarity and empathy. When Islamic education emphasizes empowerment, transparency, and social responsibility, *zakat* becomes a practical expression of equality rather than a ritual formality.

Finally, youth engagement and digital Hadith literacy highlight the evolving educational landscape. Young Muslims learn and reinterpret Hadith through digital platforms, blending traditional reverence with critical inquiry. This underscores the need for Islamic education that fosters media literacy, ethical reasoning, and scholarly guidance. Overall, the analysis shows that Islamic education plays a pivotal role in embedding equality as a core Islamic value. Through pedagogical engagement with Hadith, equality is continuously reconstructed as an ethical, social, and educational ideal guiding Muslim life in Southeast Asia.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that interpretations of equality within Prophetic traditions in Southeast Asia are neither fixed nor monolithic, but continuously shaped by the interaction between classical Islamic scholarship, contemporary reformist thought, and lived social realities. Classical Hadith interpretations have historically emphasized spiritual equality and communal cohesion, grounding moral worth in piety and ethical conduct rather than lineage, wealth, or status. These foundational perspectives remain influential, providing religious legitimacy and continuity within Muslim communities across the region. At the same time, the findings reveal a growing engagement with modern concerns that demand broader and more

socially grounded understandings of equality. Gender justice, economic fairness, and interreligious harmony have emerged as central themes in contemporary reinterpretations of Hadith. Muslim scholars, educators, and community leaders in Southeast Asia increasingly employ contextual and ethical approaches to Prophetic traditions, aligning them with present-day challenges while remaining faithful to their authoritative status. This process illustrates an active negotiation between tradition and modernity rather than a rejection of inherited religious frameworks. The study further highlights the importance of local context in shaping Islamic interpretations. Southeast Asia's multicultural and democratic environments encourage readings of Hadith that support coexistence, social inclusion, and mutual respect among diverse religious and ethnic groups. Equality, therefore, is not treated solely as a theological abstraction but as a practical principle embedded in everyday social interactions, educational practices, and community initiatives. Such localized interpretations demonstrate the adaptability of Islamic teachings and their capacity to respond meaningfully to changing social conditions. Ultimately, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of equality in Islam by showing how Prophetic traditions function as a living moral resource. Equality emerges as an evolving practice sustained by classical foundations and the creative agency of contemporary Muslims. By bridging textual analysis and empirical observation, the study underscores the enduring relevance of Hadith in guiding ethical reflection and social transformation in modern Southeast Asian Muslim societies.

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### Author Contribution

Alwy Ahmed Mohamed contributed to the field research in Kenya and initial manuscript drafting. Muhammad K. Ridwan, Qudra Bezibweki, and Muthoifin, conducted the comparative analysis with Indonesian data and finalized the theoretical framework. Both authors collaborated equally in interpreting the findings and revising the manuscript for academic clarity and consistency.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. No financial or personal relationships influenced the study's design, data interpretation, or conclusions. All research was conducted with academic independence and ethical integrity.

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