

The Future Religious Education, The Case of Indonesia: A Preliminary Study

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ABSTRACT

As a nation with more than six religions, religious education in Indonesia is a compulsory subject for primary to tertiary level students. Considering the current condition where intolerance seems to be on the increase, learning and appreciating other religious views instead of merely one's own has become a pressing need. Through literary analysis and personal interviews with teachers and religious leaders, this study explored views on the current challenges and the necessary approaches to religious education in Indonesia in the future. From the study, most participants showed an awareness of the need for a multi-faith approach, as well as a dialogical, critical, and open-minded approach to religious education. The study contributes to the literature that is focused on gaining a more holistic view of the multi-faceted society that will emerge between now and the year 2045 when students will live in a hyper-connected society.

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INTRODUCTION

As a pluralistic nation, Indonesia has a dream that in 2045, the nation will become sovereign, just, developed, and wealthy.¹ The leaders in the government, in collaboration with other leaders in industry or society, will create the framework of the dream and its roadmap. They created a roadmap to achieve the dream. However, as the nation of Indonesia consists of adherents of many religious and indigenous beliefs, one of the prerequisites to achieving Vision 2045 is religious unity. With hindsight, one can say that the religious diversity in Indonesia was not fully considered in drafting the framework and the roadmap to Vision 2045 and this issue must be addressed if all the dream (Vision 2045) is to be achieved.

Geographically, the boundaries of Indonesia are within the Ring of Fire or Circum-Pacific Belt, spreading along 40,000 km of the Pacific Ocean. There are 1,340 ethnic groups in the nation with their traditions, living on 18,307 islands in the country, and this accounts for the heterogeneous nature of Indonesian society.

Historically, since the fifth century, the Indonesian area has been visited by many foreign traders who tried to obtain spices and other Indonesian crops. The Chinese and Indian traders visited the nation regularly. Later, after the 16th century, other imperial powers such as the Dutch, British, and

¹ Muhyiddin Muhyiddin, "Future Challenges on Indonesia's Vision 2045," *Jurnal Perencanaan Pembangunan: The Indonesian Journal of Development Planning* 3, no. 1 (2019), iv.

Portuguese occupied some of the areas for centuries. With such a history, indigenous religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity have managed to interact with one another in Indonesia. There is harmony but it needs serious attention to maintain it. Therefore, even though Indonesia, as a nation gained its independence in the year 1945, building this big nation as one solid society as dreamed of by its founding fathers, has been a challenging process right from its conception. During the Cold War era and the first decades of the 21st Century, few forces in Indonesian society have tried to transform the pluralistic nation into a more monocultural and single-religious society. The Indonesian government and the citizenry have managed to reject and repel such efforts. As globalization continues, the idea of establishing mono-religious countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yaman, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan which are predominantly Muslim nations, and similar waves are blowing across countries like Indonesia. Therefore, the government views religious education as one of the important processes to maintain the unity of Indonesia as a multicultural and multireligious nation for the future, especially when the nation enters 2045 and beyond.

Based on this, this study seeks to find answers to certain questions. Several questions need to be explored to map the religious educators' and leaders' views of the issues being discussed. First, how are the religious leaders and teachers preparing for the looming challenges in Indonesia come 2045? Secondly, what are the crucial, and worthwhile topics being taught in religious education to prepare for 2045 and beyond? Thirdly, what is the most proper approach to religious education? Lastly, what are the suitable contents for future religious education in Indonesia? The result of this study is intended to equip decision-makers in the field of education to include a more holistic approach to the religious education system in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In Indonesia, it is a fact that there have been some attempts by several groups to take over the nation for their own narrow purpose starting as early as 1948. In the first decades of the 21st Century and during the Cold-war era, a few groups made efforts to forcefully alter Indonesia to become a country based on religious identity. It also happened in many other countries and this caused socio-economic disasters in Lebanon, Afghanistan, Libya, Myanmar, and other countries. Maynard observes and states her opinion about many emerging conflicts during that time: "this form involves not merely political dimensions but the full spectrum of societal interaction. Rooted in individual identification with a group, these armed struggles can be called "identity conflicts". Furthermore, she mentions that the conflicts and violence penetrate visibly into houses, communities, schools, religious grounds, and communal property."²

In Indonesia, two such conflicts based on religious identity are worth stating in more detail. First, a conflict in Poso (middle Sulawesi) started in December 1998 as fights among local youth groups but then escalated into fights between Muslims and Christians.³ Altogether 577 were killed, 384 were injured, and 7,932 houses in addition to 510 public facilities were destroyed, it was not until December 2001 that the conflicts could be resolved by governmental intervention.⁴

Another example is a conflict, a conflict that happened in January 1991 in Ambon, Maluku (Moluccan) Island, between Muslim and Christian believers.⁵ A similar conflict also occurred in Halmahera, on one of the Maluku Islands between adherents of the two religions.⁶ Reports have stated

² Kimberly A Maynard, *Healing Communities in Conflict: International Assistance in Complex Emergencies* (Columbia University Press, 1999), 33-34.

³ Muhammad Nasrum, "From Communal Conflicts to Terrorism in Poso, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia: A Shifting Terrain," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 11, no. 2 (August 1, 2016): 83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2016.1194224>.

⁴ Verelladevanka Adryamarthanino, "Poso Conflict: Background, Chronology, and Resolution Page All - Kompas.Com," 2021, <https://www.kompas.com/stori/read/2021/07/30/100000279/konflik-poso-latar-belakang-kronologi-dan-penyelesaian?page=all>.

⁵ Adryamarthanino, "Poso Conflict: Background, Chronology...."

⁶ Christopher R Duncan, "The Other Maluku: Chronologies of Conflict in North Maluku," *Indonesia*, no. 80 (2005): 58.

that more than 5000 had been killed in the Maluku wars, both by Muslim and Christian believers. What was alarming is that children as young as 10-year-olds had killed several people of a different faith.

Data released by the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs on December 31 of 2021 shows that Islam has 237, 530, 000 adherents. This makes Indonesia a nation with the highest number of Muslims in the whole world. Yet, there are many Islamic leaders and sects in Indonesia, each with their vision and agenda. While the largest sect dreams about an Islam promoting peace and unity or Islam Nusantara, a few other sects have an objective to change Indonesia from a pluralistic multicultural nation into an Islamic nation.⁷ These sects have been inspired by practices in other nations that have allowed radical Islamic forces to gain hegemony.

In Indonesia, some Islamic leaders and scholars have asserted that the phenomenon is a serious challenge for the future of Indonesia. Azis, one of such scholars, argues that the Indonesian government should do something to prevent Indonesia from being split into several smaller independent nations.⁸ The arrests of several prominent figures who act as intellectual actors behind this religious terrorism are proper but do not suffice. Furthermore, he recommends using education to increase understanding among younger generations of the importance of maintaining a solid nation based on Pancasila (meaning five foundations) which is much more important. Pancasila is the official, foundational and philosophical concept of Indonesia that the founding fathers of the nation created. In this way, religious teachers will play crucial roles in implementing the first principle of belief in the one and only God and not according to a particular religion because Indonesia has been home to various religions and indigenous beliefs even though the believers are not as many as Islam believers.

The Vision 2045 Agenda

In February 2012, there was an International Congress under the theme: “Global Future 2045- A New Era for Humanity.” The initiative was derived from Iskov, a Russian entrepreneur. The Indonesian government has taken some steps over the last decade to ensure a sovereign state. In May 2019, the Indonesian government also proclaimed the Indonesian Vision of 2045. In 2021, Vietnam also formulated its quest to become a developed country by 2045. In the same year, there was a Vision 2045 Summit attended by the Petra Group which is a diversified global conglomerate.⁹

In Indonesia, the vision consists of a dream that the nation will become a sovereign, just, developed, and wealthy one.¹⁰ The agreed plan of action for the Vision 2045 of Indonesia took two years to come into existence. Many decision-makers of the executive, legislative, and judicative bodies worked together with the academia and business leaders to formulate the dream and the roadmap. As a pluralistic nation, the dream needs many prerequisites to be fulfilled, among others are factors related to religion and the requisite religious education of the Indonesian populace.

To manifest the dream, they formulated the following milestones of the Vision:

1. Excellent Indonesian citizens who own science and technology mastery
2. Sustainable economic development
3. Even distribution and inclusive holistic development, and
4. Good governance, democracy, and Stabilization of National Defence.¹¹

Underlying the discussion is the agreement to steadfastly hold Pancasila, the Indonesian Foundations that the founding fathers formulated in 1945. Pancasila consists of the following pillars:

1. Belief in the one God.
2. Just and civilized humanity.

⁷ Abdul Munip, “Menangkal Radikalisme Agama Di Sekolah,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 2 (January 1, 1970): 159, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2012.12.159-181>.

⁸ Abdul Aziz, “Memperkuat Kebijakan Negara Dalam Penanggulangan Radikalisme Di Lembaga Pendidikan,” *Hikmah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2016): 29–58, 40.

⁹ The Star, “Petra Group Participates in Vision 2045 Summit,” November 15, 2021, <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2021/11/15/petra-group-participates-in-vision-2045-summit>.

¹⁰ Muhyiddin, “Future Challenges on Indonesia’s Vision 2045,” 3.

¹¹ Muhyiddin, “Future Challenges on Indonesia’s Vision 2045,” 3.

3. The unity of Indonesia.
4. Democracy is guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives; and
5. Social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia.

As the nation's foundation, Pancasila is well-known, and the government commits to retaining it, yet conflicts among religious adherents in Indonesia have happened several times causing a derailment of the plan.

Although the formulation of Vision 2045 is based on Pancasila, through content analysis, it is evident that the roadmap or milestones of the Vision do not include any topic related to religions and religious education, even though most of the citizens numbering about 275.25 million belong to one of seven major religions.¹²

Such an oversight is a failure on the part of the stakeholders who drafted the plan to include the results of many studies, such as the study of Sanaky in 2017¹³ and Habeahan in 2021¹⁴ for Vision 2045. These scholars revealed the important role played by religious education in shaping and developing the attitude of tolerance in the context of Indonesia's diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion. In a multi-culture and multi-religious nation, education should provide an overview and moral ideals of religion contextually instead of maintaining rigid and less humanist religious doctrines that have been held on to firmly in some communities. Education has a significant role to play in fostering early attitudes, not only in accepting the existence of other religions but also in appreciating those who have different beliefs or religions. Thus, educational design should accommodate appreciative and tolerant attitudes. It means that learning materials and processes combined with the teachers' attitudes play a decisive role.

Zuhdi and Sarwenda also stated in their study that one of the most crucial issues in public education in Indonesia is the issue of religion in the classroom.¹⁵ Since the beginning, the education system in Indonesia has recognized the religious diversity in its public school students. Each student receives religious education according to his/her religion taught by the respective religious education teachers. Therefore, local governments often create various policies and actions to maintain mutual relationships among believers of different faiths. The introduction of various religious beliefs in the classroom has been part of the schools' curricula for quite a long time. Unfortunately, in many cases, the adherents of the religious majority in those areas receive more attention, budget allocation, and privilege. Teachers often lead adherents of other religions to join the class that is intended for the majority, a practice that makes it difficult for students to understand and respect other religious beliefs. Furthermore, Zuhdi and Sarwenda also mentioned that recently, the effectiveness of religious education in Indonesian classrooms had been challenged by the occurrence of several conflicts among the Indonesian population that has exacerbated religious sentiment.¹⁶ The main targets in those conflicts were religious symbols, such as places of worship, holy books, and religious leaders. This implies a lack of respect for some people toward other religions and beliefs.

Asrori in his study asserted that a new concept of religious multiculturalism and the theory of religious education is needed to face the challenge of religious radicalism.¹⁷ It is necessary to

¹² Carlos A Scolari, "Media Evolution: Emergence, Dominance, Survival and Extinction in the Media Ecology," *International Journal of Communication* 7 (2013): 24.

¹³ Hujair AH. Sanaky, "The Role of Religious Education in Forming Tolerant Individuals," *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (September 2017): 77–89, <https://doi.org/10.20885/ijis.vol1.iss1.art4>.

¹⁴ Salman Habeahan, "Upaya Mengatasi Intoleransi Dan Radikalisme Melalui Pendidikan Agama Yang Moderat (Efforts to Overcome Intolerance and Radicalism through Moderate Religious Education)," *ESENSI: Jurnal Manajemen Bisnis* 24 (2021): 437.

¹⁵ Muhammad Zuhdi and Sarwenda Sarwenda, "Recurring Issues in Indonesia's Islamic Education: The Needs for Religious Literacy," *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 5, no. 01 (July 29, 2020): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v5i1.1038>.

¹⁶ Zuhdi and Sarwenda, "Recurring Issues in Indonesia's Islamic Education: The Needs for Religious Literacy."

¹⁷ Achmad Asrori, "Contemporary Religious Education Model on the Challenge of Indonesian Multiculturalism," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 10, no. 2 (2016): 261–84.

understand the models of religious education: from within, at, and beyond the wall. Religious education “in” the wall shapes an exclusive religiosity, while religious education “at” and “beyond” the wall contributes to shaping an inclusive multiculturalist and multi-religions model. The last two models are beneficial in Indonesia to help face the challenge of the complicated future because both help students to accept, respect, and value religious differences.

Although there are many studies on the issues as has been described, thus far, there has not been any empirical study on the awareness of most religious leaders and teachers about the new paradigm that is needed to achieve the Indonesian Vision 2045, mainly in the development of religious education concept and process to foster religious or inter-faith healthy relationships in a multi-religious society of 2045 and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

The study used qualitative analysis by exploring past studies on the topic of religious education that primarily related to the research questions. Data was obtained through questionnaires and interviews to seek answers from some respondents/participants related to the foci of this study. Participants were recruited from the researchers’ networks who have been working in religious education for years or even decades. Sixteen people (four females) participated in this study: nine are Christian Protestant, four are Muslims, Catholic, Hindi, and indigenous believers are each represented by one. The age of the participants varied from 28 to 64 years old with the mean age being 48.53. All but four have a theological background and 10 have a doctoral degree or are doctoral students. Data was collected using an open-ended questionnaire and personal interviews. The questionnaire asked questions related to religious education such as:

1. Do you think that religious education will still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond or not? Why do you think so?
2. To whom, where, when, and through whom the religious education will be given?
3. What challenges will be faced by religious education then?
4. What is the overall objective of religious education?
5. What is the curriculum content and what is the pedagogical approach for such religious education?

The data gathered was analysed qualitatively, looking for similarities and differences among different participants combined with the insights obtained through the analysis of past studies.

RESULTS

The result of the preliminary research of this study on the issues that were gathered through questionnaires and interviews are presented as followed:

1. *The need for religious education: Would religious education still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond and for what reason?*

All participants agreed that religious education will still be needed in the year 2045 and beyond. The reason is that every student needs guidance through religious education so that he/she will know how to live accordingly.

2. *The subjects of religious education: To whom should religious education be given ?*

Fourteen participants agreed that every child needs religious education since he/she starts school in Grade 12. Six also agreed that every child needs religious education from their birth. One respondent wanted this education to be provided until children finish elementary school, while another one was of the view that the education should be provided until the children finish junior high school (equal to Grade 9). Four suggested that tertiary-level students should also be equipped with religious education.

3. *The context: When and where should this kind of religious education take place?*

All but three agreed that religious education should take place first in each home and be taught by parents to their children. Two Christian respondents were of the view that parents reserve the exclusive rights as religious educators for their children. In their view, religious education is only delivered at home, not at school. But other respondents opined that schools should also deliver religious education. Three participants (two Muslims and one Hindu) posited that religious education should take place in a special place devoted to religious teaching in addition to schools.

4. *The Objective: The overall objective of religious education.*

Most participants stated that the future needs inclusive religious education in which students would learn to appreciate religious differences and value humanity above religion. In short, there is a need to prepare the younger generation to become good citizens not only in Indonesia but anywhere they find themselves in the global village.

5. *The challenges of religious education by the year 2045 and beyond.*

Most participants mentioned that there will be a need to address and introduce the issues of radicalism, gender equality and LGBT, as well as conflicts among nations including nuclear threats, and ecology.

6. *The pedagogical approach for such religious education.*

All agreed that the doctrinal teaching of one religion will not be sufficient. Instead, religious education should empower students to be critical, inclusive, open-minded, and able to live harmoniously with believers of different faiths. All participants agreed that the approach should not be doctrinal, but student-centered and life centred. This way, students are equipped to interact peacefully with whoever comes in their path regardless of the differences they might have. Knowing one's religious teaching would be useless if it does not help them to realize that the world is full of differences and that the differences should be celebrated, not eradicated. Tolerance is possible if humanity is above religious fanatical understanding that puts the believers of one faith in isolation from believers of other faiths.

A description of a pedagogical approach was obtained through the interview as follows, A team of two lecturers who teach religion (one Muslim and one Christian) used quite a unique approach for first-year university students of different faiths. They asked each student to present their respective religious understanding regarding a certain issue and also learn about the similarities and differences that their peers postulated. The students also learnt about prejudice, bias, stereotyping, and other matters that make people maintain their own opinion regardless of the differences they face in daily life. Furthermore, the students also learnt that religious understanding might need to be modified when enough scientific discoveries provide evidence that religious teaching is not accurate. For instance, the Earth is circling the sun instead of the other way around. Concepts of God should not be contradictive with scientific understanding.

One intervention to reduce intolerance and exclusivity has been tried with Maluku war survivors.¹⁸ Youths from both Islam and Christian faith backgrounds were put together for several weeks. It took place years after the war ended. In the beginning,

¹⁸ Rusli Rusli, Muhammad Syarif Hasyim, and Nurdin Nurdin, "A New Islamic Knowledge Production And Fatwa Rulings: How Indonesia's Young Muslim Scholars Interact With Online Sources," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 14, no. 2 (2020): 499.

they listened while the opponents shared how they reacted when they first learned about the war, who instructed them to get into the war, and how they felt after they 'succeeded' in killing their enemies of a different faith. One surprising thing in common was that they did not feel happy after doing that; instead, the faces and cries of their victims haunted them for years. They also felt confused, not knowing how they should live in the same places where they did the killing and met people with similar faces and faith as their victims. This uneasiness was discussed, and they were taught that the true religious teaching should be of appreciating life and not erasing it.

7. *The content of religious education.*

In general, most participants stated that the content of religious education should be contextual, meaning that it should be relevant for that time and many issues might come up that were never predicted. More importantly, all agreed that the content should not be limited to one's religious doctrines. Instead, students should learn about the uniqueness of other religions. This way, religious education is more like religious studies where one learns not only about his/her religion but about other religions as well.

Issues like LGBT, inter-faith marriage, or radicalism should be introduced early so that the students realize they are realities that must be handled appropriately. However, one Hindu adherent suggested that the issues relevant to the context of Vision 2045 and beyond are discussed first by each religious adherent in their community before being brought up to the top governmental level in the Ministry of Religions.

As a note, one representative from indigenous beliefs argued for the future needs for moral education instead of religious education in Indonesia. By focusing on morals and ethics, all religions can take part and dialogue to develop ethics and morality based on humanity.

8. *Who will conduct such religious education?*

All but two respondents from Islamic backgrounds agreed that parents should teach religion to their children. To do so, parents should have rich life experiences and have enough understanding of their religion. On the other hand, teachers for religious education should have credentials, at least equal to undergraduate academic background. Besides this, some also added more requirements like having a close relationship with God at a personal level, or pluralistic meaning that he/she can act inclusively, as Indonesia is a nation of various ethnic groups and various religions/indigenous beliefs. Teachers will play a prominent role since they have to be flexible, fluent, and open-minded to see that humanity is much more important than strict religious doctrines.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

In general, the participants viewed that religious education is still needed. However, the approach should be flexible, relational, and less dogmatic. The learning process of one's education should include other religious views and can be attended by anyone although they do not come from the same faith background.

Secondly, concerning the goal of religious education, the emphasis should be on the values of humanity, unity, and social justice which are the objectives of the religious education process. The subjects of the education process will learn to recognize biases, negative stereotypes, and prejudice. Then, they will understand, accept, and even appreciate the differences in various religious views including the view of the Divine.

Thirdly, the place of education seems to be viewed as school-centred and religious community-based. The role of a home might be difficult since not all parents have understood their respective religious teachings properly.

Fourth, how to deal with intolerance and exclusivity that often function as the foundation for radicalism. The most important view to be adopted is, that living together with people of different faith brings lots of understanding about fellow humans, their strengths, and weaknesses. The spirit is that Indonesia as a united pluralistic nation should be kept above all differences.

Education cannot become only a content-transfer process, but more of experiential learning. While learning about the multi-faith and diverse religious views or practices, the subjects, and the educator either teachers or parents should recognize their core faith. Psychologically they should feel secure when dealing with others or diversity. Otherwise, there will be confusing syncretism or relativism. With a future context that gives open access to information, space for expression, collaboration, and innovation, the exposure to diversity and multi-religious views or convergence of concepts. Some people can adapt to such contexts, while others might become extremists and seek to destroy the social system that causes such phenomena. The role of education at home, religious bodies, and educational institutions are undeniably vital for the achievement of Vision 2045 and beyond.

Furthermore, the most important religious education objective is to help the students and teachers obtain a deeper meaning of a heterogenous and multicultural nation. In short, it should give insights as to why the Creator allows such diversity in faith and culture and for what purpose such pluralism exists.

CONCLUSION

As a reflection of the findings, theologically, human beings with whatever religion that they cling to or with their spirituality, recognise the need to worship the Divine or other divine beings. In doing so, they also need to view or accept others who are different in their faith positively. This is a problem and challenge that has existed since the beginning of civilization. Theologically, humans must choose whether they explore a probability to embrace an either-or view of life and faith or neither nor and both as well as without losing the core of their faith. Thus, as life will be more heterogeneous and complicated in 2045 and beyond, finding the core of their faith or religious system becomes an urgent priority. Otherwise, religions can become systems that might bring destruction to human life and civilization or become agents that bring the end-time prematurely in a nation that has many different ethnic groups, islands, sub-cultures, and religious or spiritual communities.

As a preliminary study, this work should be continued with data gathering from a larger number of respondents and case study analyses. The need seems to be more pressing as the competition among the main players of global powers might have taken part in fostering more frictions or conflicts between nations, or religions and ethnic groups to maintain their hegemony.

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