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Balancing constitutional rights and institutional identity: Evidence from Muhammadiyah Universities in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between constitutional rights and institutional religious identity through Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at Muhammadiyah universities in Eastern Indonesia, in which the majority of students are Christian. Although the law guarantees students' rights to receive religious education in accordance with their beliefs, some Islamic higher education institutions pay insufficient attention to this provision. Through interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations, this study investigates how religious education at Muhammadiyah universities is managed to balance Muhammadiyah's institutional educational identity with the legal requirements related to students' constitutional rights to obtain religious education that corresponds to their respective religions. The findings show Muhammadiyah's commitment to providing religious education that accommodates students' religious diversity through an instructional approach known as Multicultural AIK. Nevertheless, more inclusive steps remain necessary, including facilitating religious education that explicitly indicates that the instruction students receive aligns with the religion they adhere to.

INTRODUCTION

Post–New Order, Indonesia has undergone significant changes, including the enactment of laws concerning education that accommodate human rights to freedom of religion and belief. These statutes include Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which replaced Law Number 2 of 1989. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the explicit recognition of students' right to receive religious education in accordance with their beliefs, taught by educators of the same religion (Article 12, paragraph 1a). This provision was later reinforced by the issuance of Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Schooling (*Pendidikan Keagamaan*), which further emphasises the obligation of educational institutions to provide religious education according to each student's religion. The regulation also sets out provisions governing administrative sanctions for educational institutions that violate these provisions. This policy represents the government's commitment to upholding human rights, including the guarantee of freedom of religion and belief, as stipulated in Article 28E of the 1945 Constitution and in Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights.

However, the right to receive religious education relevant to students' beliefs has not been fully realised, particularly in private religious-based educational institutions, including Muhammadiyah Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Muhammadiyah,* or PTM) (Al-Fatih, S., 2024). Several PTMs still require all students to take compulsory courses in Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education (*Al-Islam dan Kemuhammadiyahan* or AIK) regardless of their beliefs, without providing educators of religions other than Islam. Surprisingly, this situation does not spark conflict between non-Muslim students and the university. This phenomenon illustrates the intersection of individuals' constitutional rights and Muhammadiyah's institutional identity as a modern Islamic organisation. This issue leads to this central question: why and how do non-Muslim students, including those who make up the majority in certain regions, such as Kupang, Maumere, and Sorong, receive AIK instruction at Muhammadiyah universities?

Founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912, Muhammadiyah has grown into a modern Islamic movement operating at both national and transnational levels, with educational institutions established in several countries, such as Muhammadiyah Australia College (MAC) in Melbourne and Universitas Muhammadiyah Malaysia (UMAM) in Kuala Lumpur. In the Muhammadiyah education system, AIK is part of the character-building ecosystem for the academic community in PTMs, and it is usually held for four semesters, totalling eight credits.

As the adage goes, education does not exist in a vacuum; therefore, education, including religious education, must take into account the pluralistic context of Indonesian society (Yumitro & Abhiyoga, 2022). The existence and development of Muhammadiyah education, in general, cannot be separated from the diverse

backgrounds of students, particularly in terms of religious beliefs, understanding, and group affiliations. Different group affiliations, for example, have encouraged the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah to issue the Guidelines for Multicultural Islamic Religious Education, which emphasises an inclusive, dialogical, and interdisciplinary approach. The Multicultural AIK Model consists of four courses: (1) Islam and World Religions, (2) Islamic Social and Environmental Ethics, (3) Muhammadiyah Studies, and (4) Islam and Science, each of which is designed to accommodate non-Muslim students. This approach not only creates meaningful space for interfaith interaction but also serves as a constructive response to concerns about indoctrination in religious education, as highlighted by (Durham & Scharffs, 2010).

Multicultural AIK within Muhammadiyah circles is viewed as a breakthrough in maintaining a balance between the imperative provisions of legislation and mandatory regulations for providing religious education in accordance with students' religions, with the mission of preserving Islamic and Muhammadiyah identity, including through AIK teaching. However, the use of the term Multicultural AIK by some circles is viewed as reflecting an ambivalent stance on the part of Muhammadiyah in accommodating the provisions on religious education as stipulated in Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003. This suggests that the policies and practices of religious education in Muhammadiyah educational institutions are still negotiating a balance between legal norms that guarantee freedom of religion and the institutional identity they seek to maintain.

This gap presents an opportunity for further research. Research by (Raihani, 2016; Sterkens & Yusuf, 2015; Wahyudi, 2024) on religious education in schools in the context of implementing Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003 leaves higher education, particularly Muhammadiyah universities (PTMs), underexplored. Muhammadiyah universities have a distinct institutional character. While some demonstrate Islamic identities, some PTMs operate in a multi-religious society. This research seeks to address the following gap: How Muhammadiyah universities, modern Islamic higher education institutions, negotiate the constitutional rights of non-Muslim students while maintaining their ideological identity as an Islamic movement.

Discovering gaps in previous studies and phenomena across several PTMs led this study to the following novelties: First, this study introduces a new perspective on interreligious education within Islamic higher education by highlighting Multicultural AIK as a pluralism-based pedagogical innovation. Second, this study has implications for the essence of facilitating a dialogical and inclusive framework for religious education that accommodates diversity and freedom of religion. Third, this study offers practical contributions to aligning national legal norms with Islamic institutional practices, demonstrating that religious institutions can function as agents of dialogue,

inclusion, and interreligious reconciliation within Indonesia's plural educational context.

From the perspective of legal studies, this study also carries novelty in both conceptual and methodological aspects. This study seeks to strengthen the reorientation of legal studies, which have been normatively dogmatic, focusing primarily on the interpretation of legislation without examining how legal norms are actualised in institutional contexts, particularly in education. This study also explores the dynamic relationship between legal norms and institutional religious practices, specifically regarding the implementation of Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003 and Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 in PTMs. The novelty of this study is evident in two aspects. First, it reinforces the reorientation of research toward practical legal aspects, thereby stimulating critical thinking to uncover compliance issues with statutory provisions and regulations among parties involved in education, including education managed by Muhammadiyah members. Second, this study develops the concept of "balance" between individual rights and institutional identity, especially those with a religious character, such as Muhammadiyah. Striking such a balance involves positioning religious institutions not as entities that are inherently contrary to the principles of human rights as viewed by certain groups, but rather as legal subjects that can realise constitutional values through the implementation of dialogical and non-discriminatory education.

Overall, this study addresses the gap in the literature on the implementation of freedom of religion in Islamic higher education, while affirming Muhammadiyah's strategic role in developing an inclusive, humanistic, and constitution-based paradigm of religious education. Furthermore, this research offers a new theoretical framework that enriches the study of law and religious education in Indonesia, particularly in understanding how the principles of freedom of religion can be operationalised within the context of religious education provision.

METHODS

The presentation of the problem in the introductory section directs this study toward a mixed-methods research design that combines normative and empirical approaches to examine the relationship between legal norms and the implementation of religious education in Muhammadiyah universities, where Christian students dominate the student population (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the normative dimension, this study presents and compares two types of documents. First, it analyses laws and regulations related to human rights in the field of freedom of religion and belief, as well as educational laws and regulations that intersect with these rights. Second, it examined official documents issued by the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, including regulations and guidelines for implementing AIK, such as the Guidelines for Multicultural AIK and the Guidelines for AIK Curriculum Development.

Through the examination of these documents, the study aims to reveal the alignment between the principles of freedom of religion and belief in education as regulated under Indonesian law and the perspectives of Muhammadiyah as articulated in documents of the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah.

Fieldwork was conducted at four Muhammadiyah universities purposively selected for their majority of non-Muslim students. These universities include Universitas Muhammadiyah Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara), Universitas Muhammadiyah Sorong, Universitas Muhammadiyah of Education Sorong (Papua), and Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere (Flores). Fieldwork data as the empirical component was collected using three techniques: semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including university leaders, AIK lecturers, and non-Muslim students; classroom observations to understand AIK teaching practices; and the researcher's participatory involvement in several AIK-related activities (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Data collection also utilised triangulation between data from specific documents and data from interviews and observations (Patton, 2015).

The collected data was analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques, while data from various written sources (documents) were coded thematically. Each section of the document, such as articles, verses, policies, regulations, and quotations, was labelled or categorised based on a specific theme, such as freedom of religion, religious education, and obligations of educational institutions. This thematic analysis allows for identifying patterns of relationships between the normative-legalistic provisions of laws and regulations and their implementation in educational institutions. Interview transcripts and observation notes were examined through thematic content analysis. This means that the interview transcripts and field notes were read and analysed to identify key themes that recur throughout the data. Data from the interviews and observations serve as a reference for two purposes: constructing the teaching of AIK in the PTMs or Islamic boarding schools that serves as the focus of the research and developing a picture of how PTMs adapt, negotiate, or reconcile their Islamic and Muhammadiyah identities with the demands of national law on religious education (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Freedom in Indonesia and Its Implications for Education

This section presents the normative and legal justification directly related to the main issues of this study. As outlined in the introduction, this study departed from the gap between statutory provisions on religious education, particularly concerning the right of students to receive religious instruction in accordance with their own faith, and the fact that many private educational institutions fail to meet this requirement. This gap calls for a closer examination of the relevant legal provisions concerning the

protection of freedom of religion, an essential dimension of human life that must be safeguarded within the framework of the implementation of human rights.

The collapse of the New Order regime, marked by the fall of Suharto after more than three decades of authoritarian rule, created momentum for amending the 1945 Constitution, which, according to (Subekti, 2008), aligned with democratic standards through the inclusion of normative provisions on the fulfilment of human rights. This assessment is consistent with the studies by (Indrayana, 2010; Satrio, 2023; Tibaka & Rosdian, 2018; Tiopan et al., 2023). In his doctoral dissertation at the Melbourne Law School, University of Melbourne, (Indrayana, 2010) identified 15 provisions related to human rights, including freedom of religion and access to education, as enshrined in Articles 28A to 28J of Chapter XA, introduced by the Second Amendment to the 1945 Constitution. The human rights guarantees introduced by the Second Amendment to the 1945 Constitution include explicit provisions on freedom of religion and the right to education. Article 28E affirms that every person is free to embrace a religion and worship according to that religion; choose education and teaching; choose employment, citizenship, and residence; and leave and return to their country. Furthermore, Article 28E guarantees freedom of belief, expression, association, assembly, and opinion. Similarly, Article 29, Chapter XI, concerning Religion, stipulates that the state is based on the One Almighty God and guarantees every citizen the freedom to embrace their own religion and to worship according to their beliefs. These provisions are further reinforced by Article 31 of Chapter XIII concerning Education and Culture, which affirms that every citizen has the right to education and is required to follow basic education financed by the government; mandates the state to organise a national education system that fosters faith, piety, and noble character; requires that at least twenty per cent of the national and regional budgets be allocated to education; and directs the government to advance science and technology while upholding religious values and national unity for the advancement of civilisation and the welfare of humanity.

According to Nicola Colbran's study (Colbran, 2010), the inclusion of constitutional provisions on freedom of religion in Indonesia indicates two essential points. First, it reflects the state's recognition of the central position of religion and belief in the lives of Indonesian citizens. Second, it demonstrates the state's commitment to promoting or enhancing tolerance and protecting human rights. In addition to constitutional guarantees and statutory provisions, such as Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights, Colbran also notes Indonesia's progress in protecting human rights following the ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR is one of the key instruments of modern international law that positions freedom of religion within the framework of human rights, with particular emphasis on individual autonomy (Fiddes, 2012). By ratifying the ICCPR, Indonesia, as (Colbran, 2010) underscores, is legally bound to

uphold its obligations under the covenant, including the protection of freedom of religion or belief as stipulated in Article 18.

Despite normative and legal progress, several cases indicating violations of freedom of religion and belief have been documented, as reported by the Setara Institute. This civil society organisation regularly publishes assessments on the state of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia (Peace, 2024).

In a more specific domain, namely education, which is the focus of this study, numerous scholars have documented the failure to implement statutory provisions requiring that students receive religious education in accordance with their own religion. *Raihani* found that the rights of minority students to receive religious instruction consistent with their faith and to be taught by a teacher of the same religion are often restricted or left unfulfilled, even though the law requires such provisions in both public and private schools (Raihani, 2016). *I. Shafar's* research in Palembang revealed a similar pattern of non-compliance (Shafar, 2018). Comparable results were also reported by *Didik Wahyudi* in his study at Metro City Senior High School (Wahyudi, 2024), and at *Nurul Khasanah's* study of Junior High School 2 Bandar Jaya (Khasanah, 2024).

Lyn Parker, Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Western Australia, in her article entitled *Inside Indonesia*, also highlights the gap in the implementation of Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003 (Parker, 2010). On the one hand, Parker views the enactment of Law Number 20 of 2003 positively because it demonstrates the state's recognition of religious differences within educational institutions and normatively guarantees the facilitation of religious education in accordance with the religion students adhere to. However, Parker also found several cases of students from minority religious groups who were forced to transfer schools or relocate because their schools were unwilling to provide religious teachers corresponding to the students' own faith. According to (Peace, 2024), these cases serve as important indicators of the obstacles schools may face in complying with the law due to financial constraints or shortages of qualified teachers, which at times compel a small number of students to transfer schools or even relocate.

Such cases, both in the macro context of freedom of religion in Indonesia and in the micro context of education, empirically confirm the "policy–practice gap" in public policy studies and the "non-operational legal norm" in legal studies. The latter is also described as a law that exists "on paper" but is not implemented (Fuller, 1969). To sharpen this critical perspective, it is essential to revisit and document the aspirations of various community groups involved in social actions calling for the enactment of the Draft Law concerning the National Education System, which set forth provisions that were later incorporated into Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003.

On 7 June 2003, hundreds of thousands of people across East Java gathered in various locations to participate in a *Tablig Akbar* rally in support of the Draft Law concerned (Hidayatullah, 2023). In East Java, rallies in support of the draft law took place almost simultaneously at two locations on the same day. At the Delta Sidoarjo Stadium, the rally was attended by tens of thousands of students and members of Islamic mass organisations from across the province.

The Islamic organisations participating in the mass gathering included Muhammadiyah, Gontor Islamic Boarding School, the Board for the Association of Madurese Islamic Boarding School Ulama (*Badan Silaturahmi Ulama Pesantren Madura*-BASRA), Hidayatullah, the Indonesian Muslim Students Action Union (*Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia*-KAMMI), Al-Irsyad, and several other similar organisations. The rally urged the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) to immediately pass the bill into law. They reasoned that religious education is a fundamental human right. Consequently, they argued that there should be no justification for education providers to refuse to supply teachers who are of a religion that matches each student's faith.

According to Syafi'i's study (Syafi'i, 2020), three major Islamic organisations Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) alongside the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), played significant roles in the debate. Muhammadiyah, in one of its official statements, asserted that the provision guaranteeing the right to receive religious education according to the student's religious belief is consistent with the principles of human rights, democracy, pluralism, the Constitution, and universal and religious values. Similarly, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the Chairperson of the Central Board of Ma'arif NU, affirmed that the article reflects the spirit of pluralism and human rights. ICMI and MUI encouraged the DPR RI to promptly pass the National Education System Bill, in line with the demands of the Muslim community.

The demands expressed by civil society groups from Islamic constituencies have the potential to transform denominational schools into spaces of coexistence where universal principles of human rights, identity formation, and multicultural awareness intersect. When Muhammadiyah and similar institutions, such as NU, ensure that every student can study their own religion freely and with full respect, they seek to demonstrate that nurturing faith does not require coercion, that protecting diversity does not necessitate dissolving identity, and that proper education lies in cultivating mutual respect grounded in shared human dignity.

Religious Education in Muhammadiyah Higher Education Institutions (PTM)

The discussion in the previous section has revealed laws and regulations as normative and legalistic justifications, as well as imperatives to provide religious

education facilities consistent with students' religions. This study will further serve as a normative and theoretical reference for analysing the implementation of religious education in PTMs, which is the focus of this study. Since its inception, Muhammadiyah has demonstrated a strong commitment to the strategic value of education, as evidenced by its attention to social infrastructure that improves community welfare (Bachtiar, 2020).

After passing a century and now entering its second century, Muhammadiyah educational institutions have grown rapidly in several regions of Indonesia and in several countries abroad, such as Muhammadiyah Australia College (MAC) in Melbourne and Universitas Muhammadiyah Malaysia. In addition, Muhammadiyah education has also succeeded in producing several categories of individuals: those who embody the Muhammadiyah state of mind, sympathisers, cadres, activists, and leaders who have internalised Muhammadiyah's ideals as a progressive Islamic movement.

Another development that deserves appreciation is the achievements made by several PTMs. Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) and Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) are among others that have gained recognition in international rankings such as the QS and The Impact Rankings. This achievement demonstrates the increasing competitiveness of these two universities and their success in maintaining a strong Islamic ethos.

In this context, AIK serves as both an ethical foundation and an institutional ethos, advancing Muhammadiyah higher education. AIK can also be seen as a manifestation of Islamic thought within Muhammadiyah, integrating the dimensions of faith, knowledge, and social virtue that navigate the academic community in PTMs. AIK is also positioned as a distinguishing feature and even a key educational strength within PTMs. Within Muhammadiyah educational institutions, particularly at the higher education level, AIK holds a fundamental and strategic position. First, as stated in the Guidelines for the Implementation of AIK for Leaders, Lecturers, and Educational Personnel at Muhammadiyah/'Aisyiyah Higher Education Institutions (PTMA) issued by the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Leadership of Muhammadiyah 2025, AIK functions as a normative framework of ethics and ethos that serves as a behavioural guidance for all members of PTMAs. This framework applies both to daily practical behaviour, on and off campus, and to academic activities. AIK is also identified as one of the distinctive features that differentiate Muhammadiyah universities from other higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Second, another guideline published by the same council, Guidelines for the Development of the Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education (AIK) Curriculum at Muhammadiyah/'Aisyiyah Higher Education Institutions (PTMA) Undergraduate, Professional, Master's, and Doctoral Programmes, reaffirms that AIK functions as an institutional organ within all Muhammadiyah higher education institutions. As a

concrete expression of this role, every Muhammadiyah university must establish a leadership position at the vice-rectorate level responsible for AIK, along with a coordinating body for AIK-related activities.

Finally, AIK plays a fundamental and strategic role as an educational and teaching framework, commonly referred to as AIK Education. AIK is one of the defining characteristics of PTMs, as stipulated in the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership Guidelines Number 02/PEDI/I.0/B/2012 on Muhammadiyah Higher Education, Article 9(2), stating, "Muhammadiyah Higher Education must have the characteristics of the Al-Islam Kemuhammadiyahan curriculum, which is further regulated by the provisions of the Higher Education Council."

As a continuation of this provision, all PTMs across Indonesia provide AIK courses beginning in the first semester. In this sense, AIK may be compared to Islamic Religious Education (*PAI*) in public universities, which is compulsory for Muslim students. The difference, however, lies in the duration. While PAI is typically offered for only one semester, AIK can be extended for up to four semesters. For instance, the University of Muhammadiyah Malang offers AIK courses over four levels: AIK I, AIK II, AIK III, and AIK IV.

Thus, AIK functions both as a substitute for and a development of religious education, which is mandated as a compulsory subject at the higher education level under Article 12 of Law Number 20 of 2003. In the Muhammadiyah education system, AIK is also a compulsory course for all students, regardless of their study programme.

AIK, as an educational and teaching framework, is required for all students at all levels undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional. This study, however, focuses on AIK at the undergraduate level (S1).

According to the Guidelines for the Development of the Islamic and Muhammadiyah Education (AIK) Curriculum at PTMAs Undergraduate, Professional, Master's, and Doctoral Programmes, published by the Higher Education, Research, and Development Council of the Muhammadiyah Central Leadership 2025 (Majelis Pendidikan Tinggi, Penelitian, 2025), the AIK curriculum for undergraduate students consists of four courses, which are generally taught in sequence over four semesters. These include

1. AIK I: Humanity and Faith
2. AIK II: Worship, Morals, and *Mu'āmalah*
3. AIK III: Muhammadiyah Studies
4. AIK IV: Islam, Science, and Technology

The programme is divided into four stages: AIK I, AIK II, AIK III, and AIK IV, which are interconnected and continuous, providing a comprehensive understanding of Islam as a religion, humanity, Muhammadiyah, and the relationship between Islam and science.

Taken together, these four stages embody Muhammadiyah's vision to shape progressive Muslim intellectuals who are faithful in their beliefs, ethical in their

behaviour, intellectually engaged, and socially responsible. Thus, AIK serves not only as religious education but also as a framework for developing holistic Muslim personalities capable of advancing society and the global community.

For students with an Islamic background, the material presented above is neither new nor unfamiliar. By using the minimum learning achievement standards for Islamic religious education at the previous level high school Muslim students are assumed to have knowledge and learning experience with Islamic religious education materials at the tertiary level, such as a textbook written by Abd. Rahman Hery Nugroho, Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti*) for 11th-graders of high school, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, in collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Nugroho, 2021). This book discusses worship (*'ibādah*), morals (*akhlāq*), *mu'āmalah*, as well as the relationship between Islam and science. In philosophy and learning theory, several concepts can be used to explain this continuity. The concept of constructivism affirms that learners build new knowledge on the foundation of their prior understanding (Bruner, 1960a; Piaget, 2005). Furthermore, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) implies that higher education should extend students' abilities by guiding them just beyond what they could achieve independently at the earlier level (Vygotsky, 1978). The principle of lifelong learning emphasises education as a continuous process throughout life (Candy, 2002; Jarvis, 2009). In line with this, Bruner's spiral curriculum suggests that a theme can be revisited repeatedly, with increasing depth and complexity (Bruner, 1960b; Kurzman & Naqvi, 2010).

It is essential to clarify the nomenclature between religious education (*pendidikan agama*) and religious studies/education (*pendidikan keagamaan*) as stipulated in Government Regulation (PP) Number 55 of 2007. Religious education, which is taught in general higher education institutions, including Muhammadiyah universities outside the faculties or study programmes of Islamic religious studies, is primarily aimed at equipping students with the ability to practice religious teachings. It is not intended to prepare religious experts who must master the broader and more specialised fields of religious sciences. Such expertise is usually acquired in institutions specifically devoted to religious learning, such as Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), *pasraman* and *pesantian* (Hindu), *pabbajja samanera* (Buddhist), *shuyuan* (Confucian), and seminaries (Christian). Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007, Article 1, highlights the distinction as follows:

1. Religious education (**"***pendidikan agama"*) is defined as *"education that provides knowledge and shapes attitudes, personality, and skills of students in practising their religious teachings, implemented at least through subjects/courses in all pathways, levels, and types of education."*

2. Religious studies/education (**"***pendidikan keagamaan"*) is defined as *"education that prepares students to be able to undertake roles requiring mastery of knowledge about religious teachings and/or to become experts in religious sciences while practising their religion."*

Rather than preparing individuals to become experts in religious knowledge, religious education, as stipulated in several official documents, most notably Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007, emphasises the development of religious attitudes as reflected in lived religious practice. The regulation explicitly states it in *Article 2*,

1. Religious education functions to shape Indonesian citizens who believe in and fear God Almighty, possess noble morals, and are capable of maintaining peace and harmony in inter-religious relations."
2. "Religious education aims to develop students' abilities to understand, internalise, and practice religious values, harmonising their mastery of science, technology, and the arts.

Religious education at the higher education level strengthens the religious dimension of students, which is formed early in life, starting in the family environment, with parents as role models. This aligns with socialisation theory by (Roberts & Yamane, 2016), suggesting that parents and family are the primary factors in religious education within the household. It is within the family that religious values, beliefs, and practices are passed on. Within the broader framework of education, the family is essentially an educational institution, one of the three centres of education alongside schools and society.

The development of religiosity to a certain level of quality is a complex and lengthy process, as explained by the following two theories. (Fowler, 1988) theory of faith development considers cognitive development factors from childhood (intuitive-projective) to adulthood and maturity (universal faith). (Kohlberg & Power, 1981) theory of moral development explains that a person's moral development progresses from a pre-conventional stage, which is more influenced by obedience to avoid punishment, to a post-conventional stage, which prioritises universal ethics guided by conscience. Therefore, based on these two psychological theories, religious education, including AIK, plays a crucial and strategic role in shaping religious knowledge, which, in turn, shapes individual moral behaviour based on universally applicable moral principles. Because of this complex and lengthy process, it is understandable that religious education in formal institutions, including universities, is designed and implemented within a confessional framework. This model is seen as ensuring the development of faith and morals, as stated in the two theories above.

Unlike the confessional model commonly implemented in Indonesia, many European countries have developed a non-confessional model of religious education. This model emphasises the academic study of religion rather than emotional engagement and faith development based on religious teachings. The goal of religious

education in the non-confessional model is to foster intercultural understanding, tolerance, and critical reflection on diverse worldviews. Therefore, the curriculum in this model emphasises learning about religion, balancing cognitive knowledge with reflective and active engagement with diversity, rather than requiring vertical submission through consistency in carrying out the series of religious observances required by one's religion (Engebretson, 2006).

On the contrary, the confessional model in Indonesia is positioned as more than just an object of study, but as a way of life and commitment that demands emotional and religious involvement and is actualised in the practical realm. Robert Jackson notes that while the non-confessional model emphasises inclusivity and neutrality, the confessional model emphasises the formative dimension of religion in shaping identity and character (Jackson, 1997). By applying the confessional model, there is coherence between religious education and the national philosophy and constitutional mandates regarding religious education and citizen rights.

To further examine the position of religion in Indonesia and its implications for education, this study describes it by taking into account W. Cole Durham Jr.'s model in *A Comparative Framework for Analyzing Religious Liberty*, as outlined in *Law and Religion: National, International, and Comparative Perspectives* (Byrne, 2014; Durham & Scharffs, 2010).

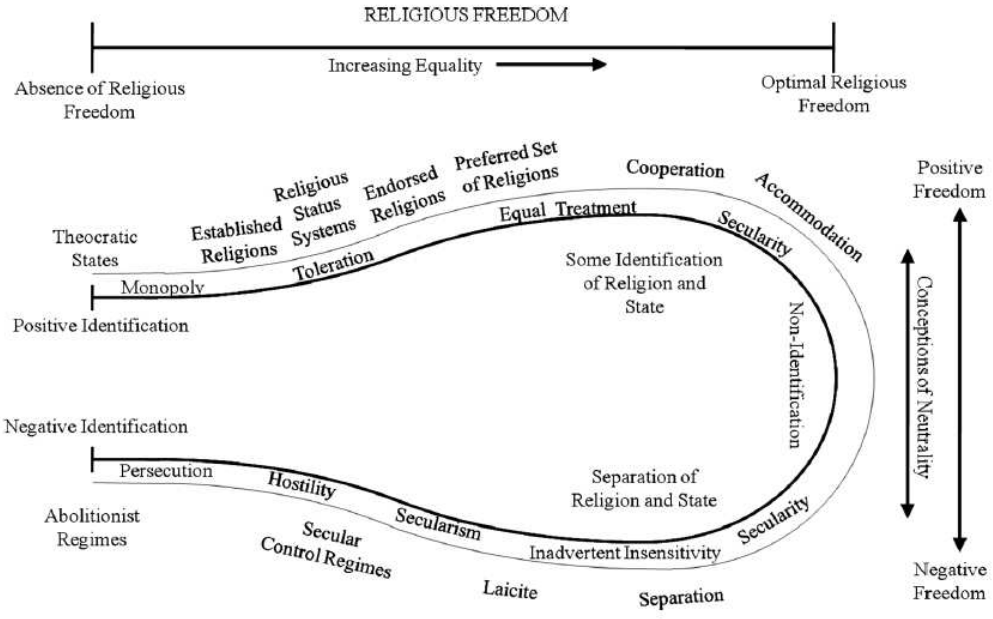
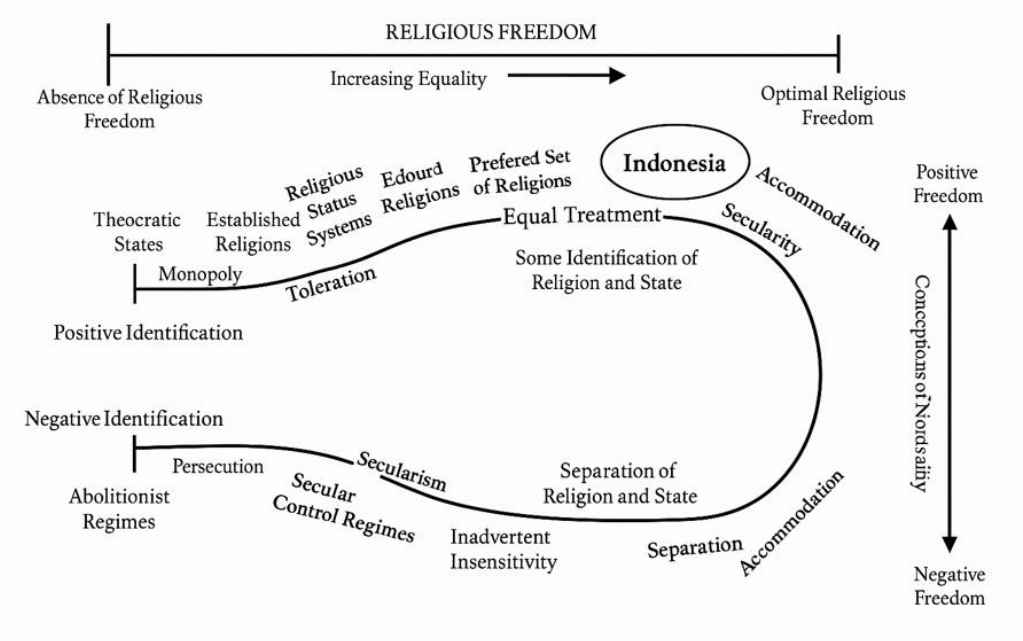


Figure 1. Model of Religion–State Relations

The figure above outlines the positions of various countries on the spectrum of state-religion relations, ranging from those that place religion under "Privileged" status. This

end is occupied by countries that grant "monopoly rights," establish certain religions as official religions, and grant them special legal status, known as theocratic states. Meanwhile, at the other end, there are also extreme depictions of the treatment of religion. In contrast, at this end are countries that designate religions to only play domestic roles, which in turn marginalise religion from the public sphere. In between these extremes, in the middle are countries with supported or prioritised religions, where the state does not designate an official religion, but shows support or preference



for one or more religions. Furthermore, this spectrum shows countries that provide equal treatment and strive to provide equal protection and services to all religions, both within the legal framework and in public administration. This model is then used to identify Indonesia's position.

Figure 2. Indonesia's Position in the Model of Religion–State Relations

The loop model above indicates that Indonesia appears to occupy a moderate position between a theocratic state and a purely secular state. Although Indonesia is sometimes referred to as a "religious state," primarily due to the first principle of Pancasila and the existence of several religious institutions under state governance, as demonstrated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, as also revealed in (Parker, 2014) study, Indonesia is not a theocracy that prioritises only one religion, like Saudi Arabia. Ideologically, Indonesia is not a truly secular state. As is the case in some Western countries, religion tends to be formally marginalised in public spaces, as is often exemplified by France. The first principle of Pancasila *Belief in the One and Only God* is an affirmative, ideological statement that the state upholds the religious dimension and beliefs, without designating any particular religion as the

official state religion (Effendy, 2003). The 1945 Constitution, particularly Article 29, reinforces this position by recognising this first principle of Pancasila while guaranteeing religious freedom for all citizens.

Importantly, this model demonstrates Indonesia's position, far from being at the end of the spectrum of religion-state relations, as Indonesia operates a hybrid role comprising three essential elements: equal treatment, cooperation, and the accommodation of the interests of state-recognised religious groups. With equal treatment, the state strives to provide equal rights and recognition to all recognised religions, as demonstrated by the policy of not designating a particular religion, such as Islam, as the official state religion. This policy recognises that every religious adherent has the right to practice their faith without discrimination. With a cooperative model, the state opens up space for dialogue and collaboration with religious groups to support a tolerant, cohesive, and collaborative religious life. With an accommodative model, the state provides facilities and support that enable religious adherents to fulfil their religious obligations and rituals, such as recognising religious holidays and celebrating each religion's rituals and allocating funds for religious activities (Bagir, 2016). Within the framework of the loop model, Indonesia also demonstrates a constructive and balanced relationship between religion and the state, actively supporting religious freedom. This is particularly evident in the legal and regulatory framework for religious education under the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology), as well as the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which largely follows the Confessional Religious Education (CRE) model.

The implementation of CRE in private educational institutions, including tertiary institutions such as Muhammadiyah universities, is diverse. The universities examined in this study, comprising the University of Muhammadiyah Kupang in East Nusa Tenggara, the University of Muhammadiyah Sorong, the University of Muhammadiyah Education Sorong, and the University of Muhammadiyah Maumere in Flores, East Nusa Tenggara, vary in terms of the provision of religious education for non-Muslim students, who constitute the major population. On average, the proportion of non-Muslim students (primarily Catholic and Protestant) at these four universities ranges from 70% to 85%.

The rectors and university leaders responsible for AIK explained that services for non-Muslim students differ across institutions. At the University of Muhammadiyah Kupang, for example, non-Muslim students receive religious education through the CRE approach. According to the rector and vice-rector for AIK, Catholic students are provided with lecturers of the same faith. This policy, the rector explained, has long been in place, predating the enactment of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and its successor regulations. Nevertheless, all students are still required to take AIK.

A similar arrangement also applies at the University of Muhammadiyah Maumere in East Nusa Tenggara, where non-Muslim students, most of whom are Catholic, constitute approximately 85% of the student body. The university provides religious education in accordance with students' respective religious affiliations. Given that Catholics are dominant, Catholic religious education is prioritised. For students of other non-Muslim faiths, such as Protestants, who constitute a very small minority, religious education is delegated to the local synod. Regarding participation in AIK, the rector explained that non-Muslim students are still required to attend, but only in a limited form, specifically AIK III, known as Multicultural Muhammadiyah. They are not obliged to participate in AIK I, II, or IV.

In contrast, the University of Muhammadiyah Education in Sorong adopts a different model. According to the vice-rector for AIK, this university does not implement the CRE approach in the same way. Non-Muslim students are required to participate in AIK, but not in its entirety. Specifically, AIK II, which addresses faith and worship, is not mandatory for non-Muslim students. Instead, AIK II is replaced by religious education courses and lecturers aligned with the students' faith traditions. For this purpose, the university appoints non-permanent lecturers to provide CRE services. Meanwhile, AIK I, III, and IV remain compulsory for non-Muslim students. Additionally, the vice-rector noted that non-Muslim students are given an optional policy: they may voluntarily attend AIK II. If they choose this option, they are exempt from participating in confessional religious education through the CRE approach.

Similar to the University of Muhammadiyah Education Sorong, the University of Muhammadiyah Sorong requires all students to take AIK courses. According to the vice-chancellor for AIK, the university does not provide separate religious education for non-Muslim students, the majority of whom are Protestant (approximately 60%). Although the AIK curriculum includes potentially sensitive topics, such as divinity, students reportedly respond positively. The Vice Rector, who also teaches AIK, explained that this course provides a space for interreligious dialogue in which students gain a direct "insider" understanding of the concept of divinity from an Islamic perspective.

To illustrate the diversity of AIK implementation in PTMAs, particularly in Indonesia's eastern regions, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara offers an interesting example. According to the Vice Rector for AIK and Cooperation, for non-Muslim students, especially Hindu students, who constitute around 2-3% of the total student population, AIK is delivered through two to three different methods:

1. AIK as a compulsory course, in which all students, regardless of their religious backgrounds, are required to take the AIK course;
2. In terms of Religious Education for non-Muslim students, particularly Hindus, the university provides dedicated lecturers of Hindu religious

education to ensure that they receive instruction aligned with their own beliefs;

3. The implementation of AIK is particularly distinctive in the Faculty of Law. In this faculty, there is a unique model of religious education. Although AIK remains a compulsory course for all students, as is generally the case in PTMs, Hindu students are facilitated with Hindu Religious Education. This course is offered in the first semester.

Meanwhile, the AIK curriculum is structured in a tiered, continuous format over four semesters, with the following sequence: AIK I (Semester I), AIK II (Semester II), AIK III (Semester III), and AIK IV (Semester IV). This tiered model supports a progressive and inclusive approach to religious education, because according to several parties, both in PTMs and the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah, it is seen as being able to accommodate students from various religious backgrounds, such as PTMs in eastern Indonesia, while maintaining the identity and values of Muhammadiyah as the special characteristics of PTMs.

By implementing a tiered, sustainable curriculum, PTMs can provide progressive and inclusive religious education, accommodating students from diverse religious backgrounds while preserving the identity and values of Islam and Muhammadiyah. Four to five Muhammadiyah universities in this study demonstrated diverse approaches to providing religious education for non-Muslim students.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined official documents issued by Muhammadiyah through the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah. This study has also carefully observed laws and regulations issued by the Indonesian government related to education, religious education, and human rights. Official Muhammadiyah documents demonstrate Muhammadiyah's commitment to balancing the demands of Islamic and Muhammadiyah identity through the implementation of Multicultural AIK, in line with imperative legislative provisions that require religious education for students in accordance with their religion.

However, at the empirical level, this study reveals diversity in the implementation of religious education through AIK in PTMs located in Christian-majority areas. Four to five Muhammadiyah universities in this study demonstrate diverse approaches in providing religious education for non-Muslim students. Universitas Muhammadiyah of Kupang and Universitas Muhammadiyah of Maumere apply the CRE model more consistently. Through the CRE model, both universities offer religious education aligned with each student's religious beliefs, although participation in AIK remains mandatory at various levels. Universitas Muhammadiyah

of Education Sorong adopted a hybrid model, combining AIK as a compulsory course with CRE-based instruction delivered by part-time lecturers. In contrast, Universitas Muhammadiyah of Sorong has established a policy for implementing regular, or conventional AIK that applies generically, in line with the policies of the Council for Higher Education, Research, and Development of the Central Board of Muhammadiyah.

In general, PTMs in this region negotiate between two potentially conflicting demands, namely between the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion that PTMs, as an education provider, must fulfil and the principle of expressing Islamic and Muhammadiyah identity through AIK teaching. Muhammadiyah and its higher education institutions interpret the constitutional provisions related to religious education and human rights not as a restriction on the implementation of Muhammadiyah's distinctive religious education, namely AIK, but rather as a stimulus for strategic thinking to offer teaching and education that synthesises and balances the external demands with the internal demands represented by Multicultural AIK.

Multicultural AIK can be viewed as a form of evolution and transformation of religious education that is responsive to diversity and to freedom of religion and belief as protected by law. Nevertheless, Muhammadiyah and the higher education institutions need to consider facilitating religious education for non-Muslim students without imposing an additional burden by requiring them to follow the distinctive PTM religious education. Such facilitation will further strengthen Muhammadiyah's progressiveness, openness, and inclusiveness.

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