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Religious education to develop respect for plurality in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Given that Indonesian people adhere to various religions and beliefs, respect for plurality is needed. Religious education can play an important role in developing respect for plurality. The goal of this study was to understand the role of religious education in developing respect for plurality in Indonesia. This research applied qualitative and quantitative methods. The research samples were young people in Yogyakarta, especially university students. The results of this study indicated that the role of religious education in universities, in terms of fostering respect for plurality and nurturing positive attitudes among students towards plurality, was of very high quality. Lecturers taught students to become more open to other believers by inviting them to engage in interreligious dialogue or visit places of worship. The results of this study could serve as a means to discover ways to foster respect for plurality among young people and assist educators in finding the most effective approaches to their education.

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Introduction

Indonesia with a population of more than 270 million people is an archipelago country, that consists of various backgrounds such as ethnicities, cultures, and religions (*Badan Pusat Statistik* 2021). There are approximately 300 ethnicities with their respective cultures, living across the country. The 1945 Constitution guarantees religious freedom. Religious plurality marks Indonesia. However, this plurality does not necessarily hinder Indonesia as a country where religions live together peacefully.

The government officially recognises six religions, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism (Indonesia Information Portal 2021). In addition to indigenous beliefs, there is a small Jewish community in Indonesia.

Plurality in Indonesia

Plurality is a characteristic of Indonesia. Although most of the population is Muslim, Indonesia is not an Islamic country, or a secular state. It is a unitary state, founded on

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a philosophy called *Pancasila* ('Five Principles'). These principles include (1) belief in one God; (2) just and civilised humanity; (3) Indonesia's unity; (4) democracy; and (5) social justice. In Indonesia, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are interpreted in ways that make them compatible with the first sila (Kamal 2023). The national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, which translates to 'Unity in Diversity', unites the plurality of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. (Rukiyanto 2019)

Plurality is viewed by some believers as a result of the diversity of the revelation of God and its human response in diverse cultures. 'Religions are many and varied and they reflect the desire of men and women throughout the ages to enter into a relationship with the Absolute Being' (John 1986, 2). Thus, plurality is a reality today. Many people study other religions and read other scriptures. Many traditions share the same basic values. In Indonesia, therefore, it could be argued that being religious means being interreligious.

The plurality in Indonesia has been viewed as a model of harmonious relationships, where people of different religions can live in peace. Indonesian Muslims are generally tolerant. However, in the last decade, radical Islam has arisen in Indonesia. The victims were minorities in the country. Religion has become 'a lethal force' (Kimball 2011).

Conflicts between religious or ethnic groups occurred in several places in Indonesia, such as in Ambon, Kalimantan, Poso, Sampang, Aceh, and Tanjungbalai (Fitriani, Harahap, and Utari 2020). These conflicts were not just based on religious differences, rather, they were also shaped by economic, political, and social factors, as the result of the politicisation of religious identities (Arifianto 2009).

Terrorism in Indonesia

Recently, terrorism has arisen in Indonesia. On Palm Sunday, a suicide bombing occurred in Makassar as reported by *Kompas* on 28 March 2021. The bomb exploded at the gate of the Cathedral Church when the liturgy was over, killing two perpetrators and injuring 20 congregants and security personnel. The perpetrators were members of the *Jamaah Ansharut Daulah* (JAD) network, allied with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Those perpetrators experienced a theological problem wrapped in various justifying arguments. In Setiawan's view, they misinterpreted religious teachings and believed that their action was defending religion (Setiawan 2022). They might belong to the Islamic fundamentalist group that rejected religious plurality. Fundamentalism presents a significant challenge and threat, causing disorder. Tibi views fundamentalism per se as primarily a political phenomenon that is first and foremost 'an aggressive politicization of religion undertaken in the pursuit of nonreligious ends'. Thus, in his view, fundamentalism is only second and 'superficially a form of terrorism or extremism' (Tibi 2002). Hence, the role of religious education is to point out that there are several different interpretations of religious teachings, some of which are more helpful than others.

In 2018, the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) reported that radicalism had entered the campus. BNPT conducted a survey in 2020 and found that 85% of the millennial generation was susceptible to radicalism (Tirza and Cendana 2022). Then, the research of the Centre of Islamic and Society Study (PPIM) of UIN Syarif Hidayatullah found that 52.1% of students were intolerant of Muslim minorities, 34.3%

were intolerant of other religions, and 58.5% had opinions that could be described as radicalism (Maulana 2017; Sadiah 2018).

Due to such worrying results, universities have been looking at how education may help to develop more positive attitude towards plurality. Religious education is one of the means to develop students' openness to other religions. Religious education should be designed to foster critical thinking, understanding, and respect for religious plurality (Carmody 2003; Davis 2010). Religious education should move beyond teaching the doctrines of a particular religion, and should instead focus on promoting peace and understanding among different religious communities (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010).

This research, therefore, attempted to determine whether religious education could overcome the growth of religious radicalism and promote tolerance among various religious groups in Indonesia.

Purpose of the research

This research started from the above concerns. The subject of the research was the extent to which religious education at several universities in Yogyakarta could play a role in developing respect for plurality.

The goal of the research was to find a way to overcome religious radicalism in Indonesia and how to develop tolerance among students. The researchers believed that religious education could become a means to develop respect for plurality among students.

Review of literature

Reflecting on the situation that has occurred recently, there are two themes that are relevant to be discussed here, namely, the religious but ignorant situation and the role of religious education in developing respect for plurality.

Deeply religious and profoundly ignorant of religions

Today, is a period when democracy in plural societies, such as Indonesia, is experiencing troubling challenges. There are many motives for conflicts (political, social, and economic), one of which is religious illiteracy. This means that people are not only ignorant about other religions, but also illiterate within their own, while identifying as deeply religious. They tend to be exclusivist due to being 'uninformed from within and from without' (Almirzanah 2011). 'Uninformed from within' means that they do not want to acknowledge the possibility of alternative religious interpretations. 'Uninformed from without' means they have no experience of meeting other religious groups or only meet for a short time.

The ignorance of religion has an enormous impact on society. Friedrich Max Müller, a pioneer in the modern discipline of the history of religions, once wrote, 'He who knows one religion knows none' (Müller 2005). Müller's statement reminds us that those who do not care to participate in religious plurality are marginalising themselves from their social context. Without understanding other faiths, individuals or communities living in a plural society do not understand themselves.

In addition to understanding other religions, acceptance of religious plurality is also important. Religious plurality recognises various religions in society. Acceptance of religious plurality will lead to the acceptance of religious freedom. In the context of religious plurality, people need to foster interreligious dialogue (Rukiyanto and Marcelinus 2020). Religious education curriculum, therefore, should include teaching about religious plurality to promote tolerance and understanding among different religious groups (Anwaruddin and Gaztambide-Fernández 2015). Students can thus, develop the skills and knowledge necessary to live in peace between different religious communities.

Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad Muhammad al-Tayyeb made a joint declaration in Abu Dhabi in February 2019 about the role of religion in modern society. The Abu Dhabi statement declares that peace is the core of every religious teaching. Religions should promote justice, harmony, and peaceful coexistence. Pope Francis and Sheikh al-Tayyeb emphasise the importance of education for the younger generation to develop the values of peace and proper understanding of religion (Setyawan 2019).

The role of religious education in promoting interreligious dialogue

In Indonesia, religious education is a compulsory subject in all levels of schools, from elementary, middle, and high schools to university. In public universities, religious education is offered according to students' religions, whereas in private universities that are affiliated with certain religions, religious education is offered according to the universities' religious affiliation. According to Zainal Abidin Bagir, who cites Carl Sterkens, there are three models of religious education, namely, monoreligious, multi-religious, and interreligious models (Bagir 2013). In the monoreligious model, religious education aims to internalise the religious tradition held by the students. This model may introduce other religious traditions, but it is placed in the perspective of their religious tradition.

In the multireligious model, religious education aims to offer knowledge about all religions without attachment to a particular religious tradition. All religions are seen as equal, and no one is superior to others. All religions are understood cognitively, objectively, and neutrally. Every religious tradition is accepted as it is. In the interreligious model, religious education aims to develop an interreligious dialogue with the possibility of mutual enrichment. In this model, everyone is represented and committed to a particular religion, but he/she does not see his/her religion as a closed system. Rather, he/she is open to other perspectives and mutual enrichment.

Based on these three models, religious education in Indonesia implements the monoreligious model. Every student learns his or her religious tradition. However, in the monoreligious model, there is a possibility to develop interreligious dialogue if the lecturers have the perspectives and capacities to do so (Bagir 2013; Parker 2014). It seems that in universities affiliated with certain religious traditions, where all students regardless of the religious traditions they belong to have to take the same religious education, the chance of developing interreligious dialogue is larger than in public universities where a monoreligious model is fully implemented. This research provides evidence to support this claim.

Method

The method used in this research is a combined quantitative and qualitative method. The quantitative method aims to reveal the role of religious education in enhancing positive attitudes towards religious plurality. With a qualitative method, it is intended that this research be conducted in a natural setting, without being influenced and manipulated (Sugiyono 2018).

The research was conducted during the pandemic. The respondents were difficult to find because there was no offline class or chance of meeting respondents individually. Therefore, to collect the data, the researchers applied a 'Google Form', a tool provided by Google for filling out questionnaires, and distributed it to students. The questions asked related to how religious education develops a respectful attitude towards religious plurality.

The researchers conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) as part of their research to deepen the research by inviting both lecturers and students to participate. The questions asked in the FGDs related to the experiences of lecturers and students in religious education and developing respectful attitudes towards other religions (see the complete questionnaires in Appendices). Instruments for both quantitative and qualitative methods were constructed for this research only.

Respondents

In this research, respondents were students at several universities in Yogyakarta Province, namely, Sanata Dharma University, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Duta Wacana Christian University, Gadjah Mada University, Atmajaya University and Yogyakarta State University. The respondents were randomly selected from these universities.

To collect the data, 'Google Form' was distributed to students through their respective classes. Students were free to fill out the Google Form or not. Data were obtained from students who filled in freely. There was an element of self-selection in answers coming from those who chose to respond. Yogyakarta was chosen since Yogyakarta is the centre of education and culture, where students come from all provinces in Indonesia.

Instruments

The techniques used were questionnaires distribution, interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires and interview guidelines were prepared based on research questions. Data analysis was performed during and after the data collection process. The analysis process included reduction, presentation of data, and verification.

The presentation of data was in the form of words, diagrams, and tables to facilitate understanding and help draw preliminary conclusions. After verification, the analysis process reached conclusion.

Results

The respondents of this research were 812 students from Sanata Dharma University, Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Duta Wacana Christian University, Gadjah

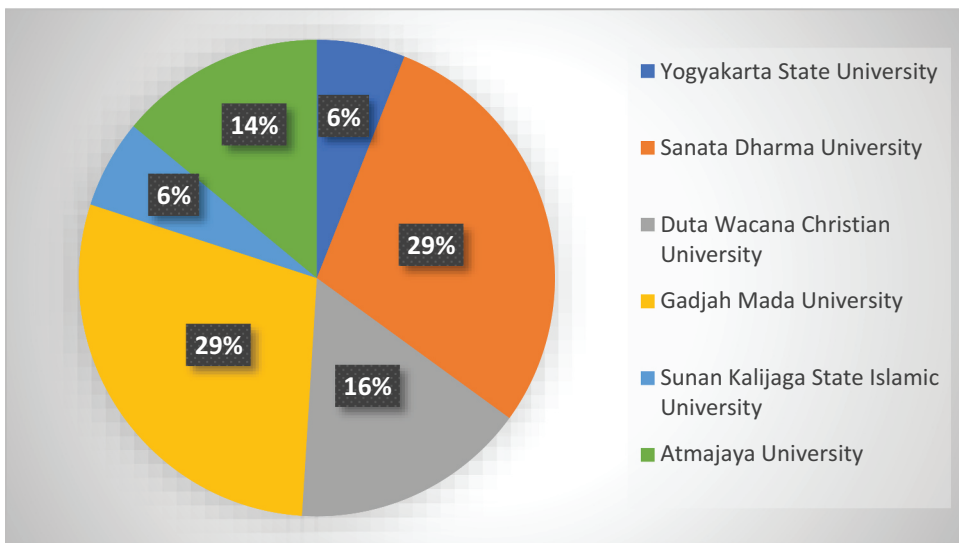


Figure 1. Respondents' universities.

Mada University, Atmajaya University and Yogyakarta State University (see [Figure 1](#)). There were 244 Muslim students (30%), 362 Catholic students (44.6%), 176 Protestant students (21.7%), 22 Buddhist students (2.7%), and 8 Hindu students (1%) (see [Figure 2](#)).

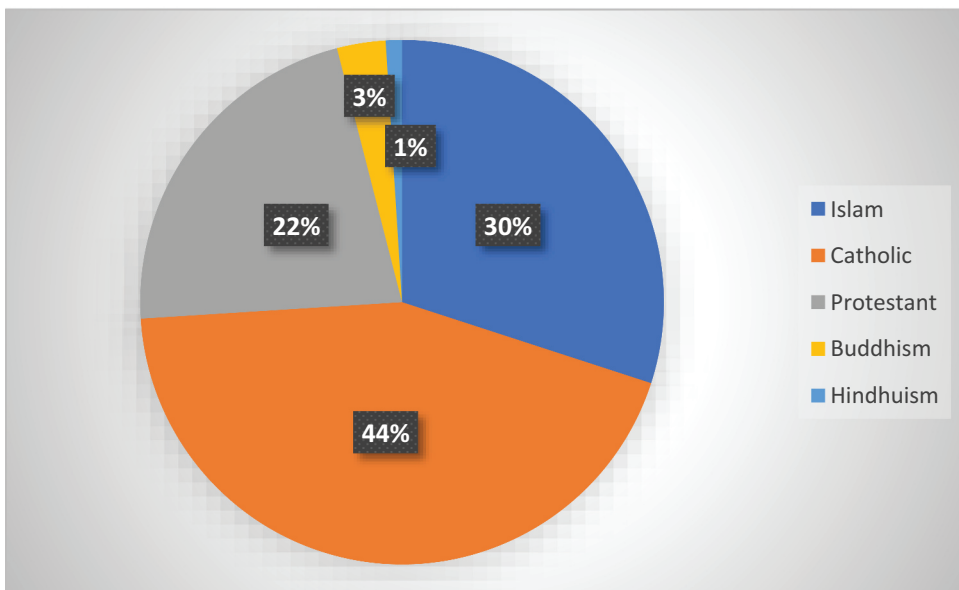


Figure 2. Respondents' religions.

Their families were generally of the same religion, and only 9% of them came from families of different religions. However, 53.7% had members of different religions in their extended family. The experience of living with family members of different religions certainly affected their openness towards other religions. As many as 88% of students agreed that religious education increased their knowledge of their own faith and of other religions; 94.6% of students agreed that religious education developed their personality and enhanced their respect for other believers; 92.9% of students agreed that religious education helped them to live their faith and the values of *Pancasila*; 98.4% of students agreed that religious education strengthened them to respect other religions; and 98.3% of students were willing to have interreligious dialogue.

Analysing two variables

In this research, two variables were analysed, namely the role of religious education and positive attitudes towards religious plurality. The findings of this research suggested that religious education played a significant role in developing positive attitudes towards religious plurality. As many as 72% of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement, and 22% agreed with it (see Figure 3).

The data indicated a substantial consensus among respondents that religious education had a positive impact on nurturing favourable attitudes towards religious plurality. A total of 94% of respondents, combining those who strongly agreed and agreed, expressed strong overall agreement with this statement, demonstrating a high level of agreement. In other words, it was highly effective in fostering positive attitudes towards religious plurality among students.

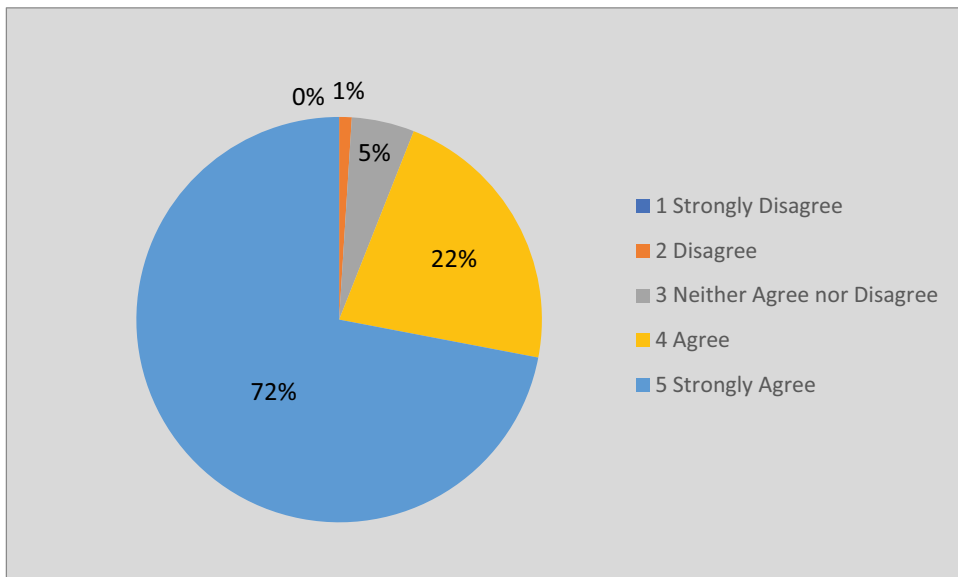


Figure 3. Religious education forms positive attitudes to religious plurality.

Interviews

Interviews with several respondents confirmed that religious education was beneficial for their faith development and their tolerance towards other religions. A total of 98% of students were open to dialogue, while 2% of students were not.

Some respondents did not want to greet other believers, based on certain *ulamas'* interpretations of religion. For example, in 1981, MUI (Indonesian Council of *Ulamas*), led by Buya Hamka, issued *fatwa* (legal opinion): joining the Christmas ceremony for Muslims was *haram*; they were recommended not to participate in Christmas activities. However, this *fatwa*, then, was interpreted as a prohibition to greet other believers. Greeting other believers meant acknowledging others' beliefs. Irfan Hamka, the son of Buya Hamka, emphasised that Buya Hamka did not prohibit Muslims from greeting 'Merry Christmas'. However, it was prohibited to participate in Christmas celebrations (Nengsih 2020). Until now, there have been two different opinions of *ulamas* about Muslims wishing Christians a merry Christmas: some allow it, and some prohibit it (Aspandi 2018).

In some universities, the students learned about other religions in religious education classes. Some students reported an increase in tolerance. There was an opportunity to invite other religious leaders in their classes. Some students experienced interreligious dialogue while visiting places of worship of other religions. Some students, however, only studied in classrooms and never experienced interreligious dialogue. Hence, the experience of interreligious dialogue depended on the creativity of the lecturers. Some lecturers invited the students to engage in interreligious dialogue, while others focused their teaching only in a classroom.

Focus group discussions

The researchers held focus group discussions to deepen this research by inviting lecturers and students.

Focus group discussions of lecturers

The first FGD was held on 12 December 2020, and was attended by lecturers from various universities with various religious backgrounds. They shared their experiences in teaching religious education. Here are some of their experiences:

Respondent 1, a Catholic lecturer from a Catholic university: 'I invited students to visit places of worship and meet various religious leaders so that students could be open to plurality'.

Respondent 2, a Muslim lecturer from a state university: 'The process of learning in my class was both intracurricular and extracurricular activities, meeting with students of other religions. This process helped students to respect other religions'.

Respondent 3, a Protestant lecturer from a Christian university: 'A dogmatic teaching of interreligious is important, but it is difficult to convey it in the language of young people. We can utilise social media to convey religious plurality to the youth'.

Respondent 4, a Muslim lecturer from an Islamic state university: 'We need to form a teaching team from various religions, so that we can teach well interreligious dialogue'.

Focus group discussions of students

The second FGD was held on 19 December 2020, and was attended by eight students from various universities with various religious backgrounds. They shared their experiences in religious education from elementary school until university. Because of the implementation of the monoreligious model, they learned only about their own religion. However, they had different experiences. In elementary school, they learned only about their own religion, without talking about other religions. However, gradually in junior and senior high school, they learned how to relate with people of different faiths. In university, they learned deeper about other religions in class. Even though the monoreligious model was still implemented in universities, it became an inclusive monoreligious model. Here are some quotations:

Respondent 1, a Protestant student: ‘In elementary school, I learned only Protestantism. In high school, I got two different teachers: the first teacher was open to plurality, while the second one did not accept plurality. I even thought that the second teacher was the correct one. In university, religious education changed my mind, I became more open. My lecturer educated us to accept plurality’.

Respondent 2, a Catholic student: ‘In elementary and junior high schools, I learned only Catholicism. In high school I started to learn other religions. Then, in university, I began to learn many religions. I have friends with different religious backgrounds. We support one another’.

Respondent 3, a Muslim student: ‘In elementary and high school, I only learned Islam. In university, religious education class changed my views and attitudes. I began to learn other religions by visiting various religious places. I became more tolerant’.

Discussion

From the results of this research, it was confirmed that religious education played a significant role in developing positive attitudes towards religious plurality. The students could develop a spirit of tolerance towards other believers. They experienced that religious education increased their knowledge about their respective religion. They also learned about other religions and about interreligious dialogue.

Religious education fostered an attitude of respect for plurality. Religious education helped students realise solidarity to build justice and prosperity in the nation. In religious education classes, they discussed how to develop positive attitudes towards religious plurality. In some classes, there was an opportunity for students to have dialogue with other believers and to visit places of worship other religions. Some lectures invited figures from other religions to learn about their respective religions. The students were willing to engage in interreligious dialogue and to cooperate with other believers. Finally, they opposed movements of religious radicalism.

Based on the results of FGDs with both lecturers and students, it was proven that students who came from faith-based universities had more experience and opportunities for interreligious learning than those from state universities that fully implemented the monoreligious model. At faith-based universities, students with different religious backgrounds could interact in the classroom. They could learn from each other about their various religions. Especially when lecturers invite students to visit places of worship of

various religions, they can learn more about other religions and can practice interfaith dialogue. The monoreligious model applied at faith-based universities, therefore, is an inclusive monoreligious model.

The results of this research showed very positive responses of lecturers and students compared to the very negative findings of the BNPT survey. This occurred because of various factors, including methodology, sample size, survey design, and the context in which the research was conducted. The respondents of both surveys were different. The BNPT survey conducted involved 13,700 respondents from 32 provinces using a face-to-face method with structured questionnaires. The objectives of the two surveys might differ. The BNPT survey might have been designed to investigate potential security concerns or risks related to terrorism, whereas this research focused on educational outcomes and attitudes.

Shared faith praxis as the way forward

To develop interreligious dialogue in religious education, there is a framework called the 'shared faiths praxis' approach, which is a modification of the 'shared Christian praxis' approach promoted by Thomas Groome (1999, 1998). The reason we use this theory is because it is familiar in Indonesia, both among Christian and Muslim scholars (for example Rohmah 2015; Syafi'i 2020; Tiyas 2020). Modification is done by Christiani in her dissertation (Christiani 2005). She develops Christian education in three levels using a metaphor of wall: behind the wall, at the wall, and beyond the wall. Christian education behind the wall has to do with Christian tradition. Christian education at the wall has to do with interreligious dialogue, which modifies Shared Christian Praxis to Shared Faiths Praxis. Christian education beyond the wall has to do with working together with people of different faiths towards peace and justice. Because of the modification, here every 'Christian' word is replaced with 'faiths'.

Shared Faiths Praxis is a participative and dialogical pedagogy in which people reflect critically on their historical agency in time and place and on their sociocultural reality, have accession together to religious story/vision, and personally appropriate it in the community with the creative intent of renewed praxis in religious faith toward God's reign for all creation. (Groome 1998)

The word 'shared' emphasises 'mutual partnership, active participation, and dialogue with oneself, with others, with God, and with story/vision of religious faith' (Groome 1998). This means that everyone is supposed to be an active participant and develop a spirit of partnership.

The word 'faiths' stresses the opportunity to make 'accessible to participants the story/vision of the faiths community over time and enable them to appropriate it to their lives' (Groome 1998). A religious story includes scriptures, traditions, liturgies, dogmas, theologies, symbols, spiritualities, songs, music, dance, art, community, and so on. Religious vision is the realisation of God's will for all creation as the Kingdom of God.

The word 'praxis' refers to intentional human activity that holds theory and practice, critical reflection, and historical participation in dialectical unity (Groome 1998).

According to pedagogical theory, praxis combines active, reflexive, and creative elements that become one in the life of participants. Shared Faiths Praxis is meant to be a teaching strategy that advances God's reign over all of creation. God wants all people to dwell in peace and justice, love, and freedom.

The first step in the Shared Faiths Praxis approach is a focusing activity, during which participants concentrate on their participation in real life. They move through five movements after that. The use of the word 'movements' implies that the phases are dynamic and adaptable; they are not sequentially exact. In movement 1 (Expressing Current Praxis), participants are invited to convey their life experiences. Then, in movement 2 (Critical Reflection on Present Action), participants are encouraged to critically reflect on and share their experiences with present praxis. Movement 3 (Making Religious Story and Vision Accessible) creates a religious narrative and vision expressions that are appropriate for the generative topic. Participants can place their critical awareness of current praxis with a generative topic in Movement 4 (Dialectical Hermeneutic to Appropriate Religious Story/Vision to Participants' Stories and Visions) by using dialectical hermeneutics with their religious story or vision. Dialectical hermeneutics engages religious traditions in conversation with life stories and critical comments on those tales. Participants can better apply their beliefs in daily life with the aid of this interpretation. Participants in Movement 5 (Decision/Response for Lived Religious Faith) can choose how to practice their religion in the real world.

Movements 1 and 2 deal with real-life and critical reflection on it, based on a commitment to the reign of God. Movement 3 gives people access to the spiritual wisdom of religious traditions that focus on the commitment to the reign of God; otherwise, many passages and religious teachings can be misused to oppress people. Movements 4 and 5, which deal with appropriating faith for life, must end with real plans for action for the reign of God. Through all these movements, religious education can nurture faith formation but at the same time be critical of the situation and committed to action that transforms society towards the reign of God. Shared Faiths Praxis can then help people be involved in the struggle for peace and justice.

To promote interreligious dialogue, the generative theme has to do with a certain aspect of other religions in comparison to one religious tradition. Examples include 'fasting', 'poverty', 'prayer', 'peace', 'love', and 'charity', as well as history or teaching of religion. In movement 1, stories of life can include interreligious conflict, as well as more positive stories, e.g. how people of different faiths can live together in harmony and friendship between people of different faiths. They can also include stories about other religious practices such as prayer and fasting.

In movement 2, critical reflection can analyse the history of relationships between people of different faiths. Critical reflection can help participants distinguish between the actions of people of other faiths and the teachings of their religions. It can also help participants see the many ways of interpreting the Holy Scriptures, which lead to the ambivalence of religions as a source of violence or peace. They can see how religion becomes violent when its core teaching is hijacked to support a certain purpose of a certain group.

In movement 3, it is important to find religious verses that support positive attitudes towards people of other faiths. There is a need to reinterpret passages that seem to instruct violence against people of other faiths. If dialogue happens between participants

from various faiths, in movement 3, each shares his or her religious teachings, stories, and visions of their sacred texts – all that support the generative theme. In this process, they are doing Shared Faiths Praxis, where interfaith dialogue and collaboration occur.

In movement 4, appropriating challenging religious texts in the attitude towards people of other faiths to modern life is crucial. This step will determine the participants' action decided in movement 5. In Shared Faiths Praxis, the process of dialectical hermeneutics occurs between a certain religion's teachings or sacred texts and contemporary life. When people of every religion have done the dialectical hermeneutic process in their religion, all participants continue to share their hermeneutical results. Every participant can learn from other religions as well. In this process, the religious identity of each participant is strengthened rather than weakened, because he or she shares his or her own religious beliefs. Participants can find similarities between religions. More often, they find differences, which they can learn to appreciate and celebrate.

In movement 5, the chosen action can lead to the work for peace and justice. In addition, participants can plan actions that express appreciation and celebration of differences in religion, ethnicity, culture, etc. This fact can support the spirit of multiculturalism.

Shared Faiths Praxis can become a possible framework to meet the challenges of religious education for both personal faith formation and social transformation because it focuses on the dialogue between life experience and religious traditions; in other words, its pedagogical dynamic moves from life to faith to life. Shared Faiths Praxis, which is based on liberation theology, is a model for religious education for the reign of God. It is very important to focus on the reign of God in the movements of Shared Faiths Praxis to avoid misdirecting this approach.

Religious education, thus, does not merely create pious students, it also makes students more civilised and humane. This means that what results from religious education must not be just a compliant Muslim going to the mosque or a devout Christian going to the church. Religious education needs to create citizens who understand the plurality in their world to encourage them to cooperate in facing communities' problems (Orchard 2015).

Religious education can promote positive attitudes towards religious plurality by teaching students about different religious traditions, encouraging them to explore their own beliefs and values, and promoting dialogue and understanding between different religious groups. This approach to religious education can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of religion and can promote tolerance and respect for religious plurality (Genç and Ershad Uddin 2023; Grimmit 1994; Skeie 1995).

Other suggestions for developing religious education are to offer religious education classes for all students from all religious backgrounds, to provide team teaching consisting of lecturers from various religions, or to invite lecturers of other religions who are experts in their own religion.

Religiosity education as the way forward

To develop positive attitudes towards religious plurality, in religious education, it is necessary to teach about other religions, and the importance of interreligious dialogue. In religious education, then, we can introduce 'religiosity education'.

Religiosity education refers to the concept of educational efforts aimed at developing the spiritual and religious dimension in an individual's life. Religiosity education encourages students to learn about other religions and engage in dialogue with other religions. Religiosity education teaches individuals to respect and understand religious plurality. The uniqueness of religiosity education is open to any religion, not only to developing mere knowledge but also to developing religious attitudes and the spirit of tolerance. Religiosity education focuses on developing attitudes of tolerance, openness, and understanding towards individuals from various religious backgrounds. Religiosity education aims to shape religious people and to become an agent of change to realise a just and prosperous society (Rukiyanto 2020).

Religiosity education is a message of faith among students so that it makes students open to people of other religions, not narrow-minded centring on their own religion. Thus, the students learn to understand and accept people of other religions. They can befriend anyone without demeaning others because of different religions. By combining religious education and religiosity education, people can develop an effective model of learning other religions based on the values of tolerance, harmony, and positive attitudes towards religious plurality.

Limitations of this research

This research had limitations due to the pandemic situation. After gathering the data, it was difficult to conduct interviews with selected respondents to clarify their answers. The researchers could only interview them via their phone or Zoom meetings.

To cover this limitation, the researchers held focus group discussions with students and lecturers. However, only a few students attended the FGDs because of exam time.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that religious education played a crucial role in developing positive attitudes towards religious plurality. Many students exhibited favourable attitudes towards plurality due to their family backgrounds and early education, which are further reinforced by religious education at universities.

Within religious education programmes, some lecturers have made efforts to promote openness to other religions. However, it was observed that many students at various universities lacked experience with interreligious dialogue. Additionally, through social media, some students followed the teachings of certain *ulamas* (Islamic leaders) who were not open to other religions, leading to a reluctance to engage in interreligious dialogue. Therefore, there is room for improvement in religious education to encourage students to be more receptive to religious plurality.

As a recommendation, religious education should be inclusive of teaching about other religions and develop interreligious dialogue. Creating mixed classes to foster respect for plurality, as seen in religiously affiliated private universities that admit students of all faiths, is a positive approach. For state universities, achieving mixed classes may be challenging due to government regulations that require state universities to provide lecturers according to the students' respective religions.

However, it remains the task of lecturers to be creative and provide diverse perspectives to introduce the concept of religious plurality and encourage inter-religious dialogue. It is also necessary to offer a mixed class to develop respect for plurality.

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Ethical approval statement

All survey and FGD participants provided their consent for publication at the beginning of the interview. Their data were reported anonymously. FGDs and interviews were conducted via Zoom meetings and were recorded due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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