

## TRANSFORMATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY IN INDONESIA: FROM DOMINANCE TO CONFESSIONAL PLURALISM

**Eko Ngabdul Shodikin<sup>1\*</sup>, Ruwandi<sup>2</sup>, Muh. Saerozi<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Madani, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

<sup>2,3</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Salatiga, Indonesia

\*[ekongabdulshodikin@gmail.com](mailto:ekongabdulshodikin@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

This study examines the transformation of religious education policy in Indonesia from the dominance of one religion to a more inclusive and dialogical confessional pluralism. This issue is important because, for decades, religious education policy has reflected a hegemonic orientation favoring one religion, potentially creating social segregation and hindering the development of interfaith tolerance. Using a literature study method with thematic and content analysis, this study examines various academic sources, national policy documents, and educational frameworks to identify patterns of paradigm shift, driving factors, and challenges in the implementation of religious education policy in Indonesia. The research findings indicate a substantial paradigm shift from



faith-based teaching focused on doctrinal knowledge and ritual observance to a humanistic model emphasizing moral values, religious moderation, and civic character formation. Post-reform socio-political dynamics, globalization, and national initiatives such as Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile program drive this transformation. However, the implementation of confessional pluralism still faces ideological, structural, and cultural obstacles, including resistance to pluralist values and limited teacher capacity. This study concludes that religious pluralism represents a new paradigm that positions religious education as a strategic instrument for building an inclusive, moderate, and civilized society. These findings reinforce the urgency of religious education reform as a foundation for strengthening social cohesion and interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Religious Education, Confessional Pluralism, Religious Moderation, Education Policy, Secularism.*

### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini mengkaji transformasi kebijakan pendidikan agama di Indonesia dari dominasi satu agama menuju pluralisme konfesional yang lebih inklusif dan dialogis. Isu ini penting karena, selama beberapa dekade, kebijakan pendidikan agama telah mencerminkan orientasi hegemonik yang memihak satu agama, yang berpotensi menciptakan segregasi sosial dan menghambat perkembangan toleransi antaragama. Dengan menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan analisis tematik dan konten, penelitian ini mengkaji berbagai sumber akademis, dokumen kebijakan nasional, dan kerangka kerja pendidikan untuk mengidentifikasi pola pergeseran paradigma, faktor pendorong, dan tantangan dalam implementasi kebijakan pendidikan agama di Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan pergeseran paradigma yang substansial dari pengajaran berbasis agama yang berfokus pada pengetahuan doktrinal dan kepatuhan ritual menuju model humanistik yang menekankan nilai-nilai*

*moral, moderasi beragama, dan pembentukan karakter kewarganegaraan. Transformasi ini didorong oleh dinamika sosial-politik pasca-reformasi, globalisasi, dan inisiatif nasional seperti Moderasi Beragama dan program Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Namun, implementasi pluralisme konfesional masih menghadapi hambatan ideologis, struktural, dan kultural, termasuk resistensi terhadap nilai-nilai pluralis dan keterbatasan kapasitas guru. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa pluralisme agama merupakan paradigma baru yang memposisikan pendidikan agama sebagai instrumen strategis untuk membangun masyarakat yang inklusif, moderat, dan beradab. Temuan ini memperkuat urgensi reformasi pendidikan agama sebagai fondasi penguatan kohesi sosial dan kerukunan antarumat beragama di Indonesia.*

**Kata Kunci:** Pendidikan Agama, Pluralisme Agama, Moderasi Beragama, Kebijakan Pendidikan, Sekularisme.

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with a very high level of religious and cultural diversity (Hariyanto, 2025; Islamy, 2022; Yani & Darmayanti, 2020), yet religious education policies in Indonesia over the past few decades have tended to favor the dominance of certain religions in the education system (Sutopo et al., 2022). This has created tensions in a pluralistic society, where various religious groups struggle for equal recognition in the context of religious education (Aprilianto et al., 2025; Idi, 2018; Mardatillah et al., 2025; Sinaga et al., 2024). Despite efforts to create inclusive education policies, many challenges remain in realizing pluralistic religious education policies, namely policies that accommodate various religious beliefs fairly and equally. With the growth of religious pluralism in Indonesia, an important question arises: can religious education policies transform from a system that favors the dominance of one religion (monotheistic religious pluralism) to a more inclusive system that respects and accommodates all religions (confessional pluralism)? This shift is significant as it can lead to a

more harmonious and respectful society, where all religious groups are given equal recognition in the context of education.

Along with social and political dynamics in Indonesia, there has been significant progress in religious education policies towards inclusivity and diversity (Gonzalez, 2025; Haley et al., 2025; Mahajan & Dureja, 2024). In the reform era, especially post-1998, efforts have emerged from various elements of society to encourage the creation of religious education policies that better reflect the religious diversity in Indonesia (Aslati et al., 2025; Fazlurrahman H, 2019). Some policies have begun to show shifts, such as the implementation of more flexible religious education in several schools and universities, and the development of curricula that are more open to pluralistic values (Abdurrohman et al., 2025; Afifuddin et al., 2025; Hariyanto, 2025; Muzayanah et al., 2025). However, despite this progress, religious education policies in Indonesia still face challenges in realizing interfaith equality. Some existing religious education policies still tend to prioritize one particular religion (Hasan, 2020), potentially causing social tensions between communities of different faiths.

Previous research has primarily focused on the dominance of certain religions in religious education policy in Indonesia, particularly regarding Islamic education in public schools (Hosen & Shukri, 2023; Karisma & Abdurakhman, 2021; Kistoro et al., 2022; Salim et al., 2024). Most studies have focused on Government efforts to introduce a more inclusive religious curriculum (Abdillah et al., 2025; Efferi et al., 2025; Muhsin et al., 2024), but few have explored in depth the process of transforming religious education policy toward confessional pluralism (Intan, 2023; Intan & Bangun, 2022). Furthermore, previous research has largely viewed religious education policy from a structural or policy perspective, without linking it to broader social and political impacts, such as how these policy changes affect interfaith relations in society. This research seeks to challenge and expand this understanding by further exploring the transformation of religious education policy and its impact on social pluralism and inclusive religious education.

This research uses the theories of religious pluralism and secularism as the basis for analyzing the transformation of religious education policy in Indonesia. The theory of religious pluralism refers to the view that various religions should be respected and given equal space in social life and education (Intan, 2023; Intan & Bangun, 2022).. Meanwhile, the theory of secularism provides the perspective that the state should separate religion from state affairs and education, thus allowing space for various beliefs to develop without domination by any particular religion (Embong et al., 2017; Ergeshov, 2025). In the context of religious education policy, both theories are relevant in explaining how the policy has evolved from a model dominated by one religion to a more inclusive and pluralistic model.

Although numerous studies have addressed religious education policies in Indonesia, most have focused on the ideological and structural aspects of these policies, such as how they are influenced by particular ideologies or how they are implemented within the formal education system (Anis Aprianti & Siti Tiara Maulia, 2023; Irham, 2025; Junaidi et al., 2024; Mumtaz et al., 2024; Nadhif Muhammad Mumtaz, 2022; Yusra et al., 2025). However, few have delved deeper into the impact of these policy changes on society, particularly regarding interfaith tolerance and more inclusive social relations. Furthermore, although religious pluralism has been incorporated into some religious education policies, much remains to be learned about how this pluralism influences public views of other religions and how these policies are implemented at the local level.

There is a pressing need for more comprehensive research specifically addressing the transformation of religious education policies in Indonesia from monotheistic to confessional pluralism, and its impact on society. The unanswered question is how these policy changes actually impact public understanding and attitudes toward other religions in the educational context, and what challenges are faced in implementing these policies on the ground. This gap is crucial to understand because inclusive religious

education policies have the potential to shape interfaith tolerance and peace in Indonesia significantly, as well as reduce the potential for conflict arising from religious differences.

Closing this gap is crucial because pluralistic religious education policies can play a crucial role in building a more harmonious and respectful society in Indonesia. A better understanding of how these policies are developed and implemented in Indonesia can provide guidance for the Government, educational institutions, and the community in creating a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. Moreover, this research can serve as a valuable resource for other countries facing similar challenges in managing religious education policies in multicultural societies, thereby contributing to the global discourse on religious education.

This research aims to analyze the transformation of religious education policies in Indonesia, specifically the shift from monotheistic religious domination to confessional pluralism. The primary focus of this research is to explore the impact of inclusive religious education policies on social tolerance and religious education in Indonesia. Based on the framework of religious pluralism and secularism, this study hypothesizes that pluralistic religious education policies will increase interfaith tolerance and strengthen shared values within society. Furthermore, this study also seeks to understand the challenges faced in implementing confessional pluralism in religious education policies in Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a literature review method (Creswell W. J. and Creswell J. D., 2018) to analyze the transformation of religious education policy in Indonesia, focusing on the shift from monotheistic religion to confessional pluralism. This approach allows researchers to systematically collect and evaluate various sources, such as journals, books, and policy reports, to understand the social, political, and educational implications of this policy

change (Fazal & Chakravarty, 2021). The research design follows a systematic approach in selecting relevant literature. Inclusion criteria for literature include sources that are credible and relevant to the topic, while sources that are unreliable or irrelevant to the research are excluded (Abbott, 2022). Data collection involved identifying and categorizing literature based on key themes, such as pluralism, secularism, and policy change. The data analysis process used thematic analysis and content analysis techniques. The selected literature was categorized based on recurring themes, such as the evolution of religious education policy, shifts in terminology, and changes in policy objectives. This analysis focuses on identifying policy patterns and shifts, particularly how these policies affect social and political structures. This methodological approach provides an operational framework for exploring the impact of these policy changes on Indonesian society and religious pluralism (Kuhlthau, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Paradigm Shift in Religious Education Policy*

Table 1 Shift in Religious Education Policy in Indonesia

Aspect		Old Paradigm (Pre-Modern Era)	New Paradigm (Post-Modern Era)	Source
Focus of Education	of	Doctrinal knowledge and memorization	Value transformation and character building	Karim et al., 2024; Mufarokah et al., 2025
Role of Teachers	of	Sole source of truth, authority figure	Facilitator, spiritual guide, mentor	Saada & Magadlah, 2021;

			Jarilkapovich, 2025
<b>Assessment Focus</b>	Cognitive aspects, memorization of religious texts	Internalization of moral and spiritual values, application in life	Jannah et al., 2025
<b>Learning Methodology</b>	Passive reception, teacher-centered	Dialogical, reflective, multicultural	Fahmi et al., 2024; Jakandar et al., 2025
<b>Integration with National Values</b>	Limited integration with broader national goals	Integrated with Pancasila values and national character education	Damanik et al., 2025; Hastuty, 2025
<b>Cultural Relevance</b>	Detached from social, economic, and cultural contexts	Contextual, promotes tolerance and religious moderation	Mufarokah et al., 2025; Fahmi et al., 2024

Religious education in Indonesia has undergone a significant paradigm shift in line with developments, social change, and the demands of globalization. In the old paradigm, religious education was more oriented towards the transfer of doctrinal knowledge (Karim et al., 2024) and the memorization of religious teachings (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2022). In this approach, the learning process focused on mastery of religious material and rituals (Mufarokah et al., 2025). The teacher acted as the sole source of truth, while students were more passive recipients of knowledge (Saada & Magadlah, 2021). Assessment focused more on cognitive aspects and memorization, rather than



on the internalization and practice of religious values (Jannah et al., 2025). The primary goal of this paradigm was to shape individuals who were devoutly religious, but this was often disconnected from the social, economic, and cultural contexts of society.

Entering the modern era, religious education policy shifted toward a new paradigm that positions religious education as a process of value transformation and character formation (Muzakki & Nurdin, 2022). This new paradigm is more humanistic, inclusive, and contextual (Damanik et al., 2025). Religious education is no longer viewed merely as teaching dogma, but rather as a means of internalizing moral and spiritual values in everyday life (Fahmi et al., 2024; Jakandar et al., 2025). Teachers now act as facilitators and spiritual guides, not merely transmitters of knowledge (Jarilkapovich, 2025). The learning process is conducted in a dialogical, reflective, and multicultural manner, fostering tolerance, religious moderation, and respect for differences (Hastuty, 2025). Furthermore, religious education is integrated with character education and Pancasila values, in line with national policy directions.

This paradigm shift is driven by several key factors. First, globalization and societal pluralism demand an open and tolerant attitude toward diversity. Second, the moral and social crisis occurring at various levels of society demonstrates the need for values-based education to strengthen national integrity. Third, advances in science and technology have changed the way young people think, requiring religious education to adapt to remain relevant. Fourth, national policies such as Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile encourage the realization of education that integrates spiritual and national values.

*Table 2 Laws Related to the Paradigm Shift in Religious Education in Indonesia*

No	Law	Description	Relevance to Paradigm Shift
1	Act No. 20 of 2003	National Education System: Regulates the education system in Indonesia, including religious education, aiming to create intelligent and high-character young generations.	This Law underpins the shift in the religious education paradigm by introducing a more holistic educational goal, focusing not only on religious knowledge but also on the development of character and social values.
2	Act No. 12 of 2010	Higher Education: Establishes regulations related to higher education, covering curriculum development and education quality, including religious education.	This Law supports the change to a more inclusive and value-based religious education paradigm, encouraging the integration of religious education with national and global culture, and better moral character.
3	Act No. 18 of 2019	Religious Education System: Focuses on the development of religious education in Indonesia, covering religious instruction in schools and	This Law promotes a religious education paradigm that is more moderate and contextual, with an approach that prioritizes the values of tolerance and character in

		<i>pesantren</i> (Islamic boarding schools).	accordance with Pancasila and the diversity of Indonesian society.
4	<b>Act No. 45 of 1945 (as amended)</b>	Education and Culture: Regulates the right of every citizen to receive education based on the development of character, morals, and personality.	This Law encourages the integration of character and moral values in education, aligning with the new paradigm that emphasizes value-based education encompassing Pancasila and pluralism.
5	<b>Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005</b>	National Education Standards: Formulates standards for all aspects of education in Indonesia, including religious education, to ensure equitable quality.	This Regulation supports a religious education paradigm focusing on educational quality that is more based on the integration of moral, religious, and national cultural values, and strengthens student character.
6	<b>Act No. 5 of 2014</b>	State Civil Apparatus (ASN): Emphasizes the importance of character and ethics in state duties, including education that produces civil	This Law supports an education paradigm that stresses character formation, which also impacts religious learning by incorporating values of ethics, integrity,

servants integrity.	with	and tolerance into the religious education curriculum.
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This table presents several laws in Indonesia that have contributed to a paradigm shift in religious education policy, from a dogmatic and ritualistic approach to a more inclusive, humanistic, and values-based paradigm. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System provides the legal basis for education that focuses not only on teaching religious knowledge, but also on developing character and social values. Law No. 12 of 2010 concerning Higher Education and Law No. 18 of 2019 concerning the Religious Education System emphasize the importance of integrating national values, pluralism, and religious moderation into the education curriculum. Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards and Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning the State Civil Apparatus also strengthen character and ethical development in education, based on the values of Pancasila. Overall, these regulations support the transformation of religious education to be more holistic, relevant to social developments, and oriented towards developing a tolerant generation, having a noble character, and understanding the social and national context of Indonesia.

*Religious Dominance in Religious Education Policy*

*Table 3 Old and New Paradigm of Religious Education Policy in Indonesia*

Aspect	Old Paradigm (Pre-Modern)	New Paradigm (Modern Era)	Source
Focus of Education	Doctrinal teaching and normative understanding of specific	Value transformation and character building, with emphasis on	Alhafidz et al., 2024; Kusmawati et al., 2022;

	religious teachings	universal values such as honesty, justice, and tolerance	Gherasim, 2024
Role of Teacher	Teacher as the single source of truth and primary authority in the learning process	Teacher as a facilitator and spiritual guide who directs students to think critically and reflectively	Saada & Magadlah, 2021; Jarilkapovich, 2025
Learning Method	Teacher-centered approach with emphasis on memorization and ritual obedience	Dialogical, reflective, and multicultural learning to foster attitudes of tolerance and religious moderation	Fahmi et al., 2024; Jakandar et al., 2025
Curriculum Structure	Religious learning dominated by material that reinforces a specific religious identity, with little room for diversity	A more inclusive curriculum, integrating Pancasila values and character education, and promoting religious diversity	Mufarokah et al., 2025; Patra, 2022
Social and Cultural Relevance	Separated from the social, economic, and cultural	More relevant to the social and cultural context of the	Gamaleal, 2024

	context of the community	community, developing attitudes of tolerance and appreciating differences	
<b>Government Policy</b>	Dominance of policies influenced by specific religious groups, with little room for inter-religious dialogue	Policies that encourage religious moderation, integration with national values, and harmonization among religious groups	Hanif et al., 2025; Syakroni et al., 2024

Since its inception, religious education policy in Indonesia has been strongly characterized by the dominance of religion, which has served as the foundation for shaping the direction and content of national education policy (Hastuty, 2025). This is inherently linked to the central role of religion in the life of the Indonesian nation, as reflected in the first principle of Pancasila, which emphasizes Belief in One Almighty God. Historically, the old paradigm of religious education emphasized doctrinal and normative understanding of religious teachings, particularly those of the dominant religions in Indonesia (Alhafidz et al., 2024; Kusmawati et al., 2022). The content, teaching methods, and objectives of religious education often focused on fostering ritual obedience and personal piety rather than developing universal human values and principles (Gherasim, 2024; Patra, 2022).

This religious dominance is increasingly evident in the curriculum structure, where a large portion of the education system is allocated to religious education based on students' religious

identities. As a result, religious education often serves as a tool to legitimize and reinforce particular religious values, aligned with the political and ideological power of dominant religious institutions. Post-independence political and social processes have also shaped the historical dominance of religion in education policy. The Government has sought to balance nationalism and the religious values promoted by religious groups, often resulting in policy compromises. The state facilitates religious instruction in schools, but religious institutions play a significant role in determining content, curriculum, and teacher selection (Mufarokah et al., 2025). This demonstrates that religious education policy is never entirely neutral; rather, it is influenced by the political power and ideological interests of state-recognized religious institutions.

Furthermore, the dominance of religious education has significantly impacted perspectives on diversity and pluralism. In many cases, religious education has become exclusive, reinforcing group identities and leaving limited space for interfaith dialogue and cultivating tolerance (Gamaleal, 2024). This exclusivity has the potential to foster social segregation in educational settings, particularly when interfaith interaction is not fully facilitated. In Indonesia's pluralistic society, religious education ideally serves as a platform for promoting religious moderation and social harmony. However, in recent years, there has been a concerted effort to shift this dominance toward a more inclusive and moderate direction. Through policies such as Religious Moderation and the Independent Curriculum, the Government has aimed to balance the role of religion with humanitarian and national values.

### *Challenges in Implementing Religious Pluralism*

The implementation of religious pluralism in education in Indonesia faces various complex challenges, both ideologically, socially, and structurally (Annisa & Tabassum, 2023; Hutabarat, 2023). Religious pluralism, as a concept, requires the recognition and acceptance of diversity of beliefs as an inevitable social reality.

However, in practice, religious education in Indonesia is often influenced by an exclusive perspective that prioritizes only the truth of each individual's religion, leaving little room for interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding (Ciocan, 2024; Galadanci et al., 2023).

One of the main challenges in implementing religious pluralism in education is the continued dominance of a dogmatic approach to religious teaching. This approach tends to isolate students from engaging with interfaith perspectives, as teachers and educational institutions may focus more on fostering loyalty to their own religious teachings than on fostering openness and respect for differing beliefs. The emphasis remains on religious conformity, which hinders the development of tolerance and interfaith dialogue (Viinikka et al., 2022).

Another challenge lies in the lack of pluralistic awareness and pedagogical skills among educators and students. Many religious education teachers in Indonesia are inadequately trained in interfaith education or pluralism, and their teaching methods often focus on memorizing doctrine rather than promoting tolerance and empathy. This creates obstacles to integrating the values of tolerance, religious moderation, and mutual respect into the curriculum. Instead of developing empathy and social understanding, the curriculum continues to emphasize religious dogma (Agung et al., 2022). As a result, students may struggle to engage constructively with individuals from different religious backgrounds.

The broader social and political environment also contributes to the challenges of implementing religious pluralism in education. In some cases, social media narratives and political movements that promote exclusive religious identities can hinder efforts towards pluralistic education. Identity politics, which manipulate religion for political gain, further complicates the creation of an inclusive educational environment (Friesen & Hölterhof, 2022; Nurshat et al., 2021). This makes it difficult for religious education to function as a stabilizing force promoting



national unity, human rights, and justice. The persistence of intolerant attitudes in society can lead to an educational climate that does not promote interfaith harmony.

Despite Government initiatives such as Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile, the implementation of these programs in schools is uneven. Not all schools have the resources, trained educators, or educational materials necessary to support interfaith understanding effectively. In many regions, interfaith interaction is limited, reducing students' opportunities to practice pluralism in their education (Ikhrom et al., 2023). These structural gaps make it difficult to realize the goal of religious moderation in the curriculum fully.

### ***Impact on Tolerance and Interfaith Social Relations***

Quantitative and mixed-methods research indicates that education plays a crucial role in shaping tolerance and interfaith social relations in Indonesia. Positively, a 2020 PPIM UIN Jakarta survey showed that the majority of students (Gen Z) have a high or very high level of religious tolerance (around 69.83%), although 30.16% still show low tolerance (Tim PPIM UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2020). This positive trend is also supported by the finding that Islamic boarding school education significantly increases tolerance. Inclusive education models, such as a multicultural Islamic curriculum and a hidden curriculum (through non-academic activities) in schools, have been shown to strengthen social cohesion. However, on the other hand, the results of the same survey reflect ideological challenges, with 56.3% of high school students believing that Islamic law should be the foundation of the state, and strong support (83.3%) for the view that Pancasila is a way of life that can be changed (Laelah et al., 2023). In addition to these ideological challenges, minority communities continue to face legal and practical challenges, particularly in the construction of houses of worship, and interfaith marriages face legal complexities and social resistance. Nevertheless, the activism and practices of

interfaith youth at the community level, through effective Employee Performance and social capital, have succeeded in maintaining harmony, strengthened by initiatives such as interfaith dialogue.

Another impact is seen in patterns of social interaction within the community. In areas such as Maluku and Poso, which have experienced religious conflict, religious education is now geared towards becoming a means of social reconciliation. Schools in these areas collaborate with religious leaders and local institutions to organize "Peace Schools," where Muslim and Christian students learn together about the values of peace and humanity (Kurniawan et al., 2022; Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). This program has succeeded in restoring trust and strengthening interfaith social relations after years of tension. This demonstrates that religious education, when managed wisely and openly, can serve as a tool for healing social wounds and fostering harmony.

The impact of religious education is also deeply felt in the mindset and character of the younger generation. In schools that implement a moderate religious approach, such as several madrasas in Central Java and Christian schools in Manado, students are encouraged to participate in interfaith social activities such as community service programs, tree-planting drives, or humanitarian projects during disasters (Larson, 2022; Triasmoroadi, 2023). These activities foster awareness that humanitarian values transcend religious boundaries. Conversely, in environments that remain closed to interfaith dialogue, young people often grow up with a narrow understanding and are easily influenced by intolerant narratives on social media.

### *Analysis of the Paradigm Shift in Religious Education Policy*

The shift in the paradigm of religious education policy in Indonesia reflects a fundamental change in the ideological and epistemological orientation of the national education system. In the early period, religious education policies reflected the dominance

of a single religion, functioning as a political and ideological tool for the state to shape public morality. Religious education was formulated within a normative framework emphasizing doctrine, orthodoxy, and ritual obedience. In this context, religion was positioned as the basis for social and moral legitimacy for the post-independence nation-building efforts.

However, with the social-political dynamics and the development of globalization, this paradigm has transformed towards a more pluralistic and confessional model. This transformation has been influenced by the growing awareness of Indonesia's religious diversity and the demand for an inclusive education system. Theoretically, this change can be understood through the framework of religious pluralism, which emphasizes the recognition of the truth and universal values contained in various religious traditions. From a secular perspective, this change represents a shift from a hegemonic approach to a system of education that places religion as a source of ethical and moral values, rather than as a tool for ideological control. Thus, the shift in the paradigm of religious education policy in Indonesia can be understood as a transition towards a more humanistic, dialogical, and contextual educational model.

Theoretically, this change can be explained through the framework of religious pluralism, which emphasizes the recognition of universal truths and values in various religious traditions. From a secular perspective, this change represents a shift from a hegemonic approach to a system that places religion as a moral-ethical reference rather than an ideological apparatus. This interpretation is consistent with Al Qurtuby, (2025); Alam & Pradhan, (2021), who found that pluralistic educational approaches in Southeast Asia contribute to interreligious understanding without negating religious identity.

### *Interpretation of the Patterns and Direction of Transformation*

An analysis of the literature shows that the transformation of religious education policy in Indonesia has taken place gradually and multidimensionally. In general, three main patterns have been identified in the process of this change: first, an increased orientation towards inclusivity in the religious education curriculum. The curriculum no longer centers on dogma and singular truth but emphasizes the internalization of universal moral values such as honesty, justice, and tolerance. Second, there has been flexibility in the pedagogical approach, where the teaching methods have evolved from instructional models to participatory and reflective ones. Third, the emergence of interfaith participation in educational activities through programs such as interfaith dialogue and interfaith collaborative projects.

Temporally, these transformation patterns can be differentiated between the pre-reformation and post-reformation periods. In the pre-Reformation era, religious education policies were centralized and normative, while post-Reformation policies emphasized educational autonomy and contextual approaches. The direction of the policy transformation generally shows a trend towards substantive confessional pluralism, although at some implementation levels, it remains symbolic. Policies such as Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile have become institutional indicators that the state is striving to integrate spiritual values with national values in the national education system. the distinction between pre-reformation (centralized and normative) and post-reformation (autonomous and contextual) policies mirrors patterns noted by Perkasa & Leonard (2022), who classified the reform era as a shift from religious indoctrination to religious democratization. Current initiatives like Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile reflect the institutionalization of these pluralistic ideals, confirming the alignment between policy direction and the global discourse on religious tolerance and civic ethics.

### ***Relationship between Policy and Social Reality***

The pluralistic religious education policy shows a positive correlation with the improvement of interfaith social relations in society. Based on various literature findings (Islam, 2025; Shodiq, 2024; Suryani & Muslim, 2024), the application of dialogical and inclusive approaches in religious education has been proven to foster tolerance and empathy across religions, especially in schools with diverse student populations. For example, the implementation of interfaith activities and joint social projects has been shown to strengthen social cohesion and reduce religious stereotypes among students.

However, the relationship between policy and social reality is not entirely harmonious. The implementation of pluralistic religious education still faces ideological resistance, especially in areas that are religiously homogeneous or have strong religious conservatism. In this context, pluralistic policies often encounter narrow interpretations of religious truth, which influence interfaith social interaction patterns. Therefore, it can be concluded that although religious education policies have moved towards pluralism, the success level is highly dependent on the socio-cultural readiness of the community and the capacity of educational institutions to internalize the values of tolerance.

### ***Challenges and Barriers in Implementation***

The transformation of policies towards pluralistic religious education is not without various challenges and barriers, both structurally and culturally. Ideological challenges are a primary factor, as most educators and society still hold exclusive views toward religious teachings. This has led to resistance against curricula and teaching methods that are interfaith.

From a structural perspective, limitations in human resources and supporting facilities are significant obstacles. Many religious education teachers lack the pedagogical competencies and interfaith insights necessary to implement the policy effectively. In

addition, the distribution of training and teaching materials that support religious moderation is still uneven across Indonesia. Challenges also arise from the dynamics of identity politics and intolerance narratives in social media, which weaken efforts for pluralistic education.

To overcome these obstacles, various literatures propose integrative policy strategies, including: (1) strengthening teachers' capacity through religious moderation training (Maghfiroh & Arif, 2025; Nurbayani & Amiruddin, 2024; H. J. Prayitno et al., 2024; Wardi et al., 2023); (2) developing contextual curricula based on Pancasila and humanitarian values (Adiyono et al., 2025; Astawaa et al., 2024; Busni & Dila, 2025; Gulyanto et al., 2024; Hosaini et al., 2024; T. Prayitno et al., 2022); and (3) fostering collaboration across religious institutions and educational entities to create spaces for interfaith dialogue (Ciocan, 2024; Khalid & Lopez, 2023; Ma'ruf, 2024; Rosidah et al., 2024; Seran, 2025; Sumi, 2025). Regional comparisons show that areas with high social interaction between religious groups, such as Yogyakarta and Bali, have been more successful in implementing pluralism values compared to religiously homogeneous areas.

### ***Theoretical and Practical Implications***

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to enriching the discourse on religious pluralism and secularism in the context of education in majority-religion countries. The findings show that educational pluralism is not identical with theological relativism, but rather as a form of reconstructing the relationship between religion and the state, emphasizing the coexistence of spiritual values in the public space. This paradigm shift challenges the classical dichotomy between religious education and secular education by introducing a hybrid model that emphasizes ethical, moral, and humanitarian dimensions.

Practically, the findings of this study have important implications for the formulation of national education policies and

strategies. For the Government, there is a need for a more systemic policy design to integrate pluralism and moderation values across all levels of education. For educational institutions, this study emphasizes the need for pedagogical innovations based on interfaith dialogue, reflection on humanitarian values, and collaborative activities. For civil society, pluralistic religious education becomes a strategic tool to strengthen social harmony and national cohesion. Thus, religious education policies oriented toward pluralism not only function as a moral education instrument but also as an ideological pillar in building an inclusive and civilized national civilization.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the religious education policy in Indonesia has undergone a significant and profound paradigm shift, a change of immense importance. It has moved from a model of religious dominance to a more inclusive and humanistic confessional pluralism. This shift is characterized by a change in the educational orientation, from a dogmatic and normative approach to a value-based education emphasizing religious moderation, tolerance, and the formation of national character. The main driving factors for this transformation include post-reformation socio-political dynamics, increased awareness of societal pluralism, and national policies such as Religious Moderation and the Pancasila Student Profile. However, implementation on the ground still faces various challenges, including ideological resistance, limited teacher competencies, and regional disparities in resources.

Our study makes a significant theoretical contribution to the development of religious pluralism and secularism in education. By demonstrating that pluralism is not merely an attitude of tolerance but a new paradigm in the relationship between religion, state, and education, our findings enrich the literature. We provide a comprehensive analysis of the social, ideological, and pedagogical dimensions of the transformation in religious education policy, while emphasizing the importance of a confessional pluralistic

approach as the foundation for multicultural education in Indonesia.

Based on these results, our study strongly recommends further research. Empirical and comparative studies across regions and institutions are needed to identify the effectiveness of implementing confessional pluralism in educational practice. Additionally, further studies are needed on the strategic role of teachers and educational institutions in internalizing pluralism values, as well as the development of interfaith pedagogical models as instruments for strengthening character and social reconciliation. Thus, religious education in Indonesia is expected to serve as an ideological and moral foundation for creating an inclusive, tolerant, and civilized society.

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