

# Does Religion Matter? Understanding Religion Subject for Formal Education

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**Abstrak:** Dalam pendidikan modern agama menjadi kajian yang tidak diprioritaskan karena bersifat *transcendental*. Pelajaran agama dalam pendidikan formal memiliki ambiguitas dalam tujuan pembelajarannya. Beberapa negara memilih untuk mengembalikan pelajaran agama sebagai pilihan daripada kewajiban. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat seberapa penting pelajaran agama dalam pendidikan formal. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah studi pustaka dari beberapa laporan penelitian model pembelajaran agama di berbagai negara kemudian dikomparasikan dengan model pelajaran agama di Indonesia. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa beberapa negara maju mulai menjadikan pelajaran agama menjadi pilihan mata pelajaran tidak wajib, sedangkan di Indonesia yang tetap mempertahankan pelajaran agama ternyata tidak sesuai dengan tujuan dari pemerintah untuk menjadikan agama sebagai sarana membentuk karakter pembelajar.

**Kata kunci:** pelajaran agama; pendidikan agama; agama di sekolah

**Abstract:** In modern education, religion becomes a study that is not prioritized because it is *transcendental*. Religion subject in formal education involves ambiguity in search of learning purposes. Some countries choose to return religious studies as an option rather than a mandatory subject. This study attempts to examine the importance of religion subject in formal education. The method employs literature reviews from research reports of the model of religion subject in particular countries thus these are compared with the religion subject model in Indonesia. The results show that developed countries reform religion subjects as an optional subject, while Indonesia might recognize religion subjects in formal education even though it factually does not indicate suitability for configuring students' characters.

**Keywords:** religion subject; religious education; religion in school

## Introduction

Religion subject is important for certain society particularly Muslims think that religion becomes a fundamental subject for human living. Neither Muslim nor Christian agrees with religion takes part in social environment. By the end of the twentieth century, the subject of religion had disappeared from the American public-school curriculum. It happened after the late 1970s the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Frances Fitzgerald concluded that religion played no role in the formation of the country or its aspirations (Viteritti, 2007). Its conclusion influenced state law to eliminate the curriculum of religion subject.

In 1970, Horkheimer, who is a member of the Frankfurt School, indicated that there was a *semantic battle* about the relationship between religion and politics (Eitler, 2005) it was caused that critical theory supposed to be understood the role of religion was to preserve political change. Religion in his discourse considered as the social function and it was similar to Benjamin as if religion as a part of the facts of “invisible orders” to confront society with the question of the criteria for a human living (Fiorato, 2005).

Meanwhile, in the Republic of Ireland, religion subject has been included in government regulation. Different with America, Ireland has led to the development and practice of an integrated curriculum, whereby the religious subject is expected to be incorporated into secular subjects and throughout the daily life of the school (Mawhinney, 2007). They put religion subject as optional as international human rights standards as if the doctrinal religious subject is taught in school, they propose to opt-out clauses for those who do not want to participate in such classes. Yet, the unsuccess program of the Republic of Ireland regulating religion subjects in school was caused by a monopoly position. The main problem of the education system produces a conflict between the right to freedom of religion (Mawhinney, 2007).

On the contrary, Indonesia has put regulation for religion subject in school by the decision of the Ministry of Religion. The government released statute in 2017 to protect religion subject has been taught in elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and universities. The decision of government statute of religion subject strives to educate students in morality, attitude, and character. It has been claimed as effective as formal education in school so that Indonesian pay attention seriously to guard religion subject still exist in formal education in Indonesia.

In 2017, Indonesia was shocked by eliminating religion subjects in formal education because certain people considered that education was not relevant in establishing students' character for Indonesia. Because of the many riots, eliminating religion subject issue was be the main conversation among Indonesian. Indonesia Religious Leader (Majelis Ulama Indonesia) claimed that eliminating religion subject referring to break the constitution and they stated the religion subject has been under-constitution and ruled in any statue of Indonesia (Sarwanto, 2017; Wiryono, 2017) and Child Protection Commission of Indonesia (KPAI) (2017) explained that children supposed to get religion subject as an effort to educate characteristic.

The implication of the explanation above refers to find out religion subject position in education. As we know that religion subject is regarded as important as formal education among Indonesian because the country itself underlines religion is the first thing first of the Indonesian constitution represented in the first point of Pancasila *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*. Understanding religion subject is the matter of this study, so it offers that does religiosity be truly needed among Indonesia and what does it effect to Indonesian characteristics. Meanwhile, the most developed country has been eliminated religion subject in formal education because of the ineffectively of the teachings.

Indonesian scholars tend to neglect religion subjects but they are always glorifying Islamic education is important in formal school. This study observes some research held in religion subjects in Indonesia, which are held by Kosim (2006) elaborated religion subject in formal school needed more time, qualified teacher, and curriculum evaluation. Manizar (2017) concluded that the religion subject of Islam had lackness on facilities, so his research found that optimization was really needed. Others, Hidayat, and Asyafah (2018) took the attention of the Islamic learning paradigm. Shofa (2018) paid attention to the management implementation religion subject on early childhood education, Fakhurrozi (2018) researched about the internalization of *tawakal* values among *santri* 'students of Islamic school'.

Conducted researches about religious education among Indonesia scholars are undoubtedly empowering the position of religion subject in formal education. Rather Islamic scholars tend to provoke the importance of religion subject than evaluating the meaning of the Indonesia constitution about religion subject in formal education. In order to point out this study, I would propose to examine understanding religion subject matter among students and to find out the effectiveness and efficiency of its subject for constitution law.

## **A Journey of Religion Subject in Formal Education Around the World**

Islamic education in Indonesia has been a long time ago since the era of the empire in Indonesia. It began the Islamic kingdom, especially in the *Wali* era. Afterward, Islamic education had a problem in Dutch colonialism when they discriminated Indonesian Muslims by design Islamic education forbid to be taught in class but it supposed to be educated out of class. Islamic teachers also reported to the Dutch government before teaching. The Dutch government, in case, easily disbanded the activities if it was not suitable for the government (Kosim, 2006).

In Japanese reign, religion subject was not allowed in formal education, so it replaced with character education. After independence, the naming of character education was recognized as a religious subject. Religion subject has already been steady in any school in Indonesia. Education ministry regulates religion subject's curriculum which must be integrated and comprehended to holy book for any religion especially to Quran and Hadiths for Muslim students.

The first national education law in Indonesia known as Law no.4/1950 that mentioned religious education should be an optional subject. Following the political transition from Soekarno reign to New Order in the 1960s, religious education became subject of the curriculum for the effort of the New Order government emphasizing the first principle of Pancasila, *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*, as a schema for defeating the communist ideology. By the designed, the Law No.4/1950 had been replaced Law No.2/1989 chapter 9 stated that religious education would be compulsory in every level of formal education (Zuhdi, n.d.).

Great Britain had a different problem in religious education because their system was free from the influence of the religious organization. It began when Margaret Thatcher was Prime-Minister of Great Britain regulating the inter-religion concept that underlined the importance of the Anglican Church in the proses of teaching religion. The government configured teaching religion as well as the importance of requirements of religious pluralism. The act highlighted the goal of the curriculum of religion courses should not be converted into formal education (Tinikashvili, 2013).

Scotland also had a different history of the religious education journey. The Church dominated hugely for the provision of elementary education responsibility. In 1872, the Church of Scotland school was replaced with local authority control under

the term of the Education Act and became non-denominational even though the Church played the main role in its management. Scotland retained the principles of Protestant Church for the religion subject and the Church role was responsible for regulating of teaching management (Jajanidze, 2015).

In addition, the United States, the best known as freedom country, regulated religious education in several times. In 1791, the First Amendment to the constitution of America protected privately religious expression and activities from government interference and discrimination. The end of World War II and the Holocaust, Americans were becoming cognizant of religious diversity in the United States. It influenced the state became the guarantee of freedom of religion and equality. The religion was not taught in the formal education of the United States but the lesson on religion was conducted in Sunday Schools and the attendance was not mandatory for students (Jajanidze, 2015).

I assume that several countries have different perspectives facing the social phenomena in their occasion. The implication of the difference in religious education regulation depending on their condition. Yet, I observe that developed countries have already configured the social environment so they are able to separate between religion and government. It indicates that their people, especially the United States, have been an awareness of religion apart from their life without institution installation.

### **Comparison Study Between Religion Subject and Constitution Purposes**

Indonesia government has already regulated religion subject into the constitution. It refers to educational law No. 20 the year 2003 to provide religious education to students depended in their religion. As an archipelago country, the identity of Indonesia is too many that sometimes it becomes a particular problem in toleration. According to Lubis (2014) explained in his article that the education constitution generates intolerance among society. Not only intolerance but also fanaticism emerges among society throughout groups among society (Riyanto, 2000).

In late 2018, PPIM (Center for the Study of Islam and Society) unveiled intolerance and radicalism among religion teachers in formal education. They published the research data to provide society if religion subject in Indonesia needs to be paid attention. Because of the sensitivity issue about radicalism in Indonesia, the article has been deleted from the website to avoid the chaos. When the article came up in the digital world, it became

the most popular news among (Intan, 2018; Muthahhari, 2017; Rakhmah, 2019; Tempo.com, 2019).

Therefore, removal of religion subject becomes popular among society because it is not effective as well as constitution purposes. Based on released regulation from the ministry of religion, religion subject is important to students. There are three purposes of religion subject, which are instilling students to have faith and devotion to God; developing competency, knowledge, attitudes, and skills of students to become a good scholar; and enhancing *akhlak* for students individually and social skill for being humanistic among society.

I assume that religion subject and constitution purposes have contrary reality in certain occasions. First, instilling students to have faith and devotion to God supposed to be implied in attitude and behavior. In fact, there is students' brawl among schools in Indonesia often happened in a year even it generated fatalities (Nugroho, 2018; Pahrevi, 2018; Suryacahya, 2018). Contrary, any religion in Indonesia especially Islam prohibits the adherents to hurt each other even to kill. As Muslim, there are Quran verses and hadiths prohibit each other such as

احتملوا فقد اكتسبوا ما بغير والمؤمنات المؤمنین يؤذون والذین  
مبینا وإثما بهتانا

“and those who hurt people who are Muslim and Muslima without their mistakes, then really they have borne a lie and a real sin” - QS. Al-Ahzab: 58.

الشر من امرئ بحسب، يحقره ولا يخذله لاو يظلمه لا، المسلم أخو المسلم  
المسلم أخاه يحقر أن

“Every Muslim is a brother to each other, may not abuse him, do not let him (be tyrannized), and do not also humble him, enough someone to do evil, by the way, he denigrates his fellow Muslims” – HR. Muslim.

كفر وقتاله فسوق المسلم سباب

“Denouncing a Muslim is a wicked deed and fighting it includes acts of kufir” – HR. Bukhari and Muslim.

Second, developing competency, knowledge, attitudes, and skills of students indicates to order society behavior. Meanwhile, a great deal of attitudes of Indonesia students is not representing the religion. For instance, bullying, harassment, and verbal abuse emerge in any social media user in Indonesia. Recently, Audrey has suspected as a victim of bullying and became viral in social media. There is a petition for Audrey with hashtag #JusticeforAudrey as a bullied victim by others (CNN Indonesia, 2019; Kami, 2019; Mardiyansyah, 2019; Yuslianson, 2019). Third, enhancing *akhlak* for students individually and social skill for being humanistic among society seem to be denied by the adherents in their sins. It unconsciously generates in social media activities such as verbal abuses or satires on their comments.

The comparison between religion subject and constitution purposes does not suit in real life. This is possibly caused by the system of religion education deficiency. The government asserts to pay attention to religion subject matter in education to configure students' attitude and behavior while they consider that religion subject is a part of curriculum material in the educational system. Moreover, state educational institutions regulate religion subject for less time contrary to Islamic schools which much pay attention to religion. Rather regulation of religion subject is less effective for state educational institution than configuring attitude and behavior of the students.

Therefore, many developed countries took down the religion subject in there such as German regulated religion education to be eliminated, Ireland provided parents opting to take the children out of religious instruction (TheJournal.ie, 2016). Indeed, English pays attention to improve religious awareness in England, religions may have to let go of education (The Economist, 2018). In other words, developed countries prefer eliminating religion education in formal education inside in their curriculum. The implication of religion subject matter drives society only to discuss about faith and devotion to God instead of configuring the attitude and behavior.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of religious education in Indonesia indicates awareness of students to be faith and devotion to God theoretically. Rather students' attitude and behavior might not be configured by religion education in formal school. As developed countries recognize religion education ineffective for establishing the attitude and behavior of the



students, so they possibly eliminate religion subject in their curriculum or making its subject being an option.

Constitution purposes regulate religion into the curriculum in Indonesia supposed to be carried out as educational regulation. The cases of students' brawls indicate failure educational regulation putting religion subject into the main curriculum. It is not only degenerating religion values but also misunderstanding constitution purposes. Indonesia throughout the ministry of religion might take a part of this problem to solve religion education proportionally.

Taking down religion subject in the curriculum does not break the national principle of Pancasila especially in first verse *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* and it does not indicate that Indonesia education refers to secularism. I conclude that it is a proper way to save the values of Islamic teaching and to regulate the educational curriculum properly. Seemingly, education in Indonesia needs to regulate the curriculum in search of proper decision for separating religion and formal education. In order to decide wisely, there must be particularly time for religion outside of school, so it might not eliminate the religion subject clearly, but it only separates religion subject of formal education.



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