

Impacts of Indonesian National Education Policy in Responses to Covid-19 Pandemic on Hindu Faith-Based Schools Student Assessment

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ABSTRACT

The Covid-19 outbreak caused significant changes in Indonesian education policy, especially on the national assessment and examination system for the primary and secondary levels. The purpose of this article is to describe the national education policy taken by the Indonesian government in response to Covid-19 and its impact on the student assessment and government recognition of Hindu faithbased schools known as *Widya Pasraman*. The data were collected through field research observation, interviews, and analysis of legal documents on national religious education policy. The data analysis is done through the qualitative data analysis method.

The results of this study show that policy changes in the national exam system in response to Covid-19 have a significant impact on the institutional recognition process of Hindu faith-based religious education schools and the assessment of learning outcomes in *Widya Pasraman*. The pandemic complicated the bureaucratic processes of the development of *Widya Pasraman* institution as the implementation of mono-religious education policy model taken by the government of Indonesia.

Keywords: Covid-19 impact, Hindu faith-based school, student assessment

I. Introduction

Indonesia is a multifaith country, where the government officially recognizes six-state formal religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. According to census data of 2010 (National Statistic Bureau, 2010), Islam covers almost 87% of the Indonesian population, followed by 9.87% Christianity, 1.69% Hinduism, 0.72% Buddhism, and 0.56% other religions. Despite Islam being the majority, Indonesia is not an Islamic country by the constitution. The

national ideology is *Pancasila* (Five Principles), where the first principle is belief in One God Almighty.

However, as the majority population in Indonesia, the values of Islam have a significant impact on the Indonesian religious life policy, including the national education sector. This policy is reflected in the Indonesian government's national constitution adopting the mono-religious education model as public religious education. The Indonesian National Education System Act of 2003 (hereafter written as NESA) reinforced that religious education is part of the curriculum in public schools. In NESA, the Indonesian government introduced and acknowledged two types of religious education: *pendidikan agama* and *pendidikan keagamaan*. *Pendidikan agama* is religious education in formal subjects delivered in schools and universities. All students from early childhood to college must be taught the religious subject following their religious belief and delivered by teachers from the same religion.

Pendidikan keagamaan is religious education delivered in the form of respective religious traditions, also known as faith-based education, with the primary purpose of educating students to become religious preachers or experts in their religious knowledge. The NESA mandates this type of faith-based education. The government is obliged to recognize, develop, and support the establishment and development of faith-based educational institutions of Islam, Christianity, Catholics, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Government supports the establishment and development of faith-based schools and educational institutions by issuing a set of government regulations for each type of religious institution. For that purpose, in 2007, the government enacted Government Regulation Number 55/2007, which regulates Religious Education and Faith-based Religious Education, including Hindu faith-based religious institutions for Hindus.

Indonesian Hindu community responded to the recognition of faith-based school policy by establishing Hindu schools for early childhood, elementary, secondary, and high school levels. The enactment of Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 56 2014 on Hindu Faith-Based Education become the

operational, legal foundation to establish the Hindu schools. It took the whole year of 2015 for the Directorate General of Hindu Society Guidance of Ministry of Religious Affairs to prepare the detailed technicalities required and design program dissemination.

Then, beginning the year 2016, the Hindu community established various levels of Hindu faith-based schools in several parts of Indonesia. Ironically, it is a matter of the fact that the establishment of those Hindu faith-based schools is a totally new experiment for Indonesian Hindu people, for there was no prior experience of having formal faith-based religious schools under the management and financial support of the Ministry of Religious Affairs for the primary and secondary levels (Landmann, 2012; Nala, 2004). On the other hand, there are five state Hindu colleges and universities and more than ten private Hindu colleges in Indonesia under the management of the Directorate-General of Hindu Society Guidance of Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In 2019, those newly established Hindu faith-based schools should attend the National Based School Examination and National Examination for their Grade 12 students as a requirement to graduate from schools. The national exam is part of Hindu religious school recognitions and assessments by the Indonesian government. According to NESAs, the management authority of the faith-based schools are under the supervision of MORA. However, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) is in charge of such schools' National Exam policies. In this way, any change in national education system recognition and assessment methods introduced by the MOEC will directly affect the religiously affiliated schools under the supervision of MORA, including those of Hindu schools.

In December 2019, the government introduced a radical change on the National Exam policy after the New Minister of Education and Culture appointment in the second term of the Joko Widodo presidential election. At the same time, the spread of Coronavirus Diseases 19 (Covid-19) forced the Indonesian government to significantly change the national education policy for national schools exam and

recognition system. One of the substantial policies taken by the government was the cancelation of the National Exam for the Year 2020 (Wajdi et al., 2020).

The purpose of the present study was to discuss the impact of Indonesian government education policy in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its effects on the Hindu faith-based school student's assessment and recognition by the Ministry of Education and Culture. How do those policies affect Hindu faith-based schools' recognition and student assessment system? What kind of procedures does the Hindu schools management take to adapt to those changes?

II. Literature Review

In the following sections, I describe the political background and the context of how the overall Indonesian national religious education policy led to the Hindu faith-based school establishment. In the first section, I briefly explore the Indonesian religious education policy enacted in 2003 of the National Education System Act (NESA), which was born as educational reform following the fall of the New Order of Suharto in 1998. The description followed by the issuance of several government regulations on the Hindu faith-based education as the legal base for Hindu people to start the Hindu schools under the management responsibility of MORA.

Types of Religious Education

Religious Education (RE) refers to education related to knowledge of spiritual values. Religious education has various definitions and practices in different countries, and it depends on the religious education policy taken by its government (Gross, 2011). This is based on the fact that in certain countries, religious affairs and religious education are separated from the role of the state, while in other countries, religious life and education for citizens are considered as part of the state responsibilities (Anita Lie, 2014; Fancourt, 2015; Gross, 2011).

This difference is reflected in the definition of religious education given by religious education experts. According to the notion of religion as a belief system, Gross (2011) defines religious education as "education related to systematic

instruction concerning a specific faith or practice that is categorized as religious." Furthermore, Gross quotes Schreiner (2002) that in practice, there are three types of religious education, namely: (1) education *into* religion; (2) education *about* religion; and (3) education *from* religion. The grouping of religious education according to its objectives, as stated by Schreiner, is also confirmed by Fancourt (2015), which distinguishes religious education into three types: (1) learning *into* religion; (2) learning *about* religion, and (3) learning *from* religion.

Each country has different explicit policies in determining which type of religious education among the three types mentioned above to be applied to their school education curriculum (Fancourt, 2015). The differences in religious education policies taken by the government of a country depend on several factors. Schreiner (2015) and Gearon (2014) argued that at least four considerations influence the form of religious policy implemented in a country. These are (1) differences in the composition of religious adherents in a country; (2) differences in people's perspectives on the role and value of religious teachings; (3) differences in the relationship between religion and the state; and (4) differences in the internal structure of the education system or schools in each country.

In line with Schreiner, Fox (2008) stated that based on the typology of the relationship between state and religion studied from 175 countries, there are two major groupings of relations between religion and state, namely (1) separation of state from religion; and (2) state involvement in regulating religion. Based on the involvement of the state in regulating religion, there is four types of relations, namely: (1) supportive ; (2) restriction ; (3) legislation (4) regulation.

Indonesian Policy on Faith-Based Religious Education

Based on Fox's typology of state-religious relations, Yusuf and Sterken (2015: 108) analyzed trends in religious education policies taken by the Indonesian government. Based on the formulation of religious education policies in Law 20/2003 of NESAs and the sequential legislations, Yusuf and Sterken concluded that the Indonesian government adheres to the mono-religious education model. In this

religious education model, students are directed to understand, appreciate, and practice one type of religious knowledge, namely only the religion they adhere to. The direction of religious education is also clear, namely, to create citizen who believes and are devoted to God Almighty, following the religion adopted by each student (Yusuf & Sterkens, 2015, pp. 113 - 116)

The concept of religious education in Indonesia cannot be separated from the context that in the First Principle of *Pancasila* (Five Principles of Indonesia), it is emphasized that Indonesia is based on the belief in One Supreme God. Therefore, religious education is provided as part of the national education curriculum, and its implementation is regulated through several policies as outlined in the legislation (Yusuf & Sterkens, 2015). This preference is reflected in Indonesian government policy, which mandates that religious education be delivered at all levels, educational courses, and educational units, based on students' beliefs and delivered by teachers of the same religion (Article 12.1 of NESAs).

The preferential state-religion relationship is reflected in Article 30 of 2003 NESAs, which regulates the objectives, roles, and form of Faith-based Religious Education (*Pendidikan Keagamaan*). In contrast to religious education, which is held in formal schools, faith-based religious education is defined as community-based education based on the uniqueness of religion owned and organized by groups of adherents of religions in Indonesia. Article 30.4 stipulates that the government-recognized forms of religious education are Islamic *diniyah* and *pesantren*, *pasraman* as Hindu traditional boarding school, *pabhaja samanera*, which belong to Buddhists, and other similar forms. The *pasraman* is an Indonesian term for the Indian Hindu traditional education system, known as an *ashram*.

The Indonesian government is following up on the provisions on Religious Education and Religious Education in Article 12 paragraph (1), Article 30 paragraph (5), and Article 37 paragraph (3) of Law of 20/2003 NESAs by issuing Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and FaithBased Religious Education. In addition to regulating the implementation of religious education through formal subjects, Government Regulation Number 55/2007 regulates the

main provisions regarding the establishment, implementation, and management of religious education institutions by each group of religious adherents. Provisions establishing and implementing *pasraman* as a form of Hindu religious education are regulated in Chapter III, Fourth Part, Articles 38 to 41, Government Regulation Number 55/2007. Pasraman education can be carried out through formal, nonformal, and informal education by following government regulations. The Act regulates the form, purpose, path, and level of education and the requirements for establishing formal Hindu schools under the basic nomenclature "Widya Pasraman" by Indonesian Hindus. Widya Pasraman's education model resembles Islamic-style formal schools called *Madrasah*.

Widya Pasraman provides Hindu religious education for preschools, elementary schools, junior and senior high schools. The goal of the establishment of Widya Pasraman is to prepare students to become community members who comprehend and follow Hindu religious teachings' ideals and become experts in Hinduism. Article 30 paragraph (5) of Law No. 20/2003 National Education System and Article 9 paragraph (3) of Government Regulation 55/2007 stipulated the guideline for the establishment and operational procedure for religious-based schools. These provisions, among other things, state that the establishment and operation of *Widya Pasraman* must comply with the Minister of Religious Affairs regulation on technical, administrative, and eligibility standards for operating faith-based schools.

Tabel 1. Legislations on Hindu faith-based School Establishment

| NO | Name of Regulation | The Relevance to Hindu Faith-Based School |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | Law Number 20/2003 on National Education System Act | The recognition of Hindu faith-based religious education with the term "Pasraman," the Indonesian term for Indian "ashram." |

| | | |
|---|--|---|
| 2 | Government Regulation Number 55/2007 on Religious Education and Faith-Based Religious Education | The introduced term "Widya Pasraman" as mandatory nomenclature for naming Hindu the faithbased school institution |
| 3 | Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 56/2014 on Hindu Faith-based Religious Education | Govern the requirement to establish the Hindu school, the curriculum content, student assessment system, school accreditation, etc. |
| 4 | Decision Letter Number 4/2015 of the Director-General of Hindu Society Guidance on Technical Guidance for Establishment of Formal Pasraman | Provide technical guidance and requirement for establishing <i>Widya Pasraman</i> |

The issuance of a set of legislations on Hindu faith-based education, as shown in Table 1, indicated that the Indonesian government prefers the preferential state-religion relationship, as concluded by Yusuf and Sterkens (2015).

III. Method

This study used a qualitative approach. The data were collected through field observation and interviews performed from January 2019 to March 2020 at two locations: (1) *Madyama Widya Pasraman Rsi Markandya Taro* of Tegallalang, Gianyar Regency, Bali; and (2) *Utama Widya Pasraman Ganesa Parwati*, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. These schools were the first Hindu faith-based schools equal to Junior and Senior High School, which performed the first National Exam in 2019. An analysis of legal documents on national religious education policy backed up the data set. The data analysis was done through the qualitative data analysis method.

IV. Result

The Hindu Faith-Based Schools Establishment

Provided with the whole legislation on Hindu faith-based schools, in 2016 Hindu community in several areas of Indonesia started launching *Widya Pasraman* schools under the direction of the Directorate General of Hindu Society Guidance of Ministry of Religious Affairs. Between 2016 and 2019, the Indonesian Hindu community pioneered the establishment of formal Hindu schools under the basic nomenclature *Widya Pasraman*.

MORA Regulation Number 56/2014 specifically mentioned that the name of a Hindu faith-based school for each school level should follow the nomenclature or basic terminology given in Sanskrit to signify the school level. The Hindu Religious Education unit's nomenclature, in addition to being required to use the term "Widya Pasraman," Sanskrit phrases are also used as indicators for each degree of formal pasraman education. *Pratama* for Early Childhood Education, *Adi* for Elementary School, *Madyama* for Junior High School, *Utama* for High School, and *Maha* for Higher Education are the Sanskrit terms used as level markers. Each of these terms comes before the nomenclature of *Widya Pasraman* and is followed by the name of the pasraman institution in Sanskrit or other Hindu languages. The provision of nomenclature for the preschool to Senior High School level of *Widya Pasraman* is shown in Table 2.

Data of the Directorate General of Hindu Society Guidance of MORA (2017) listed two schools of *Utama Widya Pasraman*, two *Madyama Widya Pasraman*, four *Adi Widya Pasraman*, and more than 15 *Pratama Widya Pasraman* established by the Indonesian Hindu community, located scattered from Papua, Bali, Sulawesi, East Java, and Sumatra islands. Since the *Utama* and *Madyama Widya Pasraman* were modeled after Junior and Senior High School, 2019 was the time for the Grade 9th and 12th students to attend the national exam to graduate from their school.

Table 2. The Nomenclature for Hindu faith-based Schools

| School Level | Name of Hindu | Equivalence to Public School | Years in School |
|--------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
|--------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------|

| | School | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Pre-School/Kindergarten | <i>Pratama Widya Pasraman</i> | <i>Taman Kanak-Kanak (TK)</i> | 2 |
| Elementary School | <i>Adi Widya Pasraman</i> | <i>Sekolah Dasar (SD)</i> | 6 |
| Junior High School | <i>Madyama Widya Pasraman</i> | <i>Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP)</i> | 3 |
| Senior High School | <i>Utama Widya Pasraman</i> | <i>Sekolah Menengah Atas (SMA)</i> | 3 |

Following the National Education Standard, Hindu faith-based schools' student assessment and national examination system should follow the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) assessment system.

In the Indonesian context, the government regulates student learning assessment for primary and secondary schools through MOEC; one of the most contemporary is Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 23/2016 concerning the National Standard of Assessment. The Act stipulated that student assessment consists of three types, namely: (1) Assessment by the teachers; (2) Assessment by the school/Education Unit; (3) Assessment by the government, in the form of National Exam (hereafter written as NE).

The assessment administered by the Education Unit (Indonesia: *Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional*, the National Standard Based School Exam) is an assessment of learning outcomes by the Education Unit to determine the achievement of graduate competency criteria in all courses. The score obtained from NE functions as student criteria for school graduation and at the same time serves as a student's entrance score to higher education and college. In this way, the *Madyama Widya Pasraman* in Gianyar, Bali, and *Utama Widya Pasraman* Ganesa Parwati in Banyuwangi, East Java, attended the *Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional*, USBN for short, held in April 2019, and the National Exam scheduled for May 2019.

Bureaucratic Problems in Widya Pasraman's First National Exam

The Utama Widya Pasraman Ganesa Parwati and Madyama Widya Pasraman Rsi Markandeya Taro successfully performed their first student national assessment in 2019 held by MOEC. Based on the interviews with the principals and teachers of *Widya Pasraman*, the procedure to be accepted as the participant of the National Standard Based School Exam and National Exam by MOEC was a complicated and long bureaucratic process. The Indonesian education system is governed by a long-standing separation between Islamic and general streams, with education policy and execution separated between the MOEC and MORA complicated the effort (Formen & Nuttall, 2014). Despite being backed up with a set of legislation on Hindu faith-based education issued by the government agencies, the existence of Widya Pasraman schools under MOEC was not recognized by the MOEC.

Since 2017, MOEC has gradually introduced and implemented the Computer Based Test system for National Assessment (Retnawati et al., 2017). As a new Hindu faith-based school under the supervision of MORA, the existence of *Widya Pasramans* was not recognized and acknowledged yet formally by the educational agencies responsible for national assessment under MOEC. The lack of coordination and communication of education management between MORA and MOEC caused the Widya Pasraman school were not included as an NE participant in Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation Number 4 of 2018 on the National Standard Based School Assessment and National Examination (Segara, 2020).

Controversy and Critics on National Exam

The *Pusat Penilaian Pendidikan* (Center for Educational Assessment of the Ministry of Education and Culture) administered the *Ujian Nasional*. The NE is a standardized evaluation system for primary and secondary education in Indonesia and compares the quality of education at various levels. The national exam is used to assess students' achievement of the Graduate Competency Standards (*Standar Kompetensi Lulusan*) at the elementary, secondary, and high school national-wide. The national exam evaluates student learning outcomes to determine graduates'

national competencies in specific subjects. The national exam's implementation principles are objective, fair, and accountable (Nurudin, 2007). At the same time, national exams are held at least once and no more than twice in a single academic year.

However, the practice of NE has become a debated issue among Indonesian educators and policymakers (Saukah & Cahyono, 2015). Those who support NE argue that NE is a necessary tool to improve the national education quality. The government agencies believed that gradually increasing the NE graduation score would help Indonesia close its education gap and other countries. The poor level of Indonesian education achievement is regarded as a source of harassment worldwide. Furthermore, the national exam is expected to eliminate regional differences in school quality and serve as a vehicle for enhancing Indonesia's educational quality.

On the other hand, many opposed to the concept argue that the national exam has no intellectual or legal base (Silverius, 2010). Ironically, it is famous for answer-key leaks, cheating, fraud, and bribery. Some students argue that the exam is too difficult for them. Schools were forced to devote more time to student preparation, significantly straining both teachers and students. The failure rate on the NE is typically very low due to cheating and dishonest practice issues. Critics argue that it does not accurately portray Indonesian students' true competency. The NE ignores that each child is born different and unique; each has unique potential (Alawiyah, 2015). By expecting each child to achieve the same standard in the subject matter being tested, the national examination ignores the diversity of student potential. At the same time, practitioners considered the national exam's implementation violated various education principles outlined in NESA.

After the long debate and disagreement, the Indonesian government issued MOEC Regulation Number 43/2019 in December 2019 on National Standard Based School Exam and National Exam (Alawiyah, 2015). As a matter of fact, in October 2019, Joko Widodo was re-elected as president for a second term. He then appointed Mohammad Nadiem Makarim, a young technocrat, as Minister of Education and

Culture for his ministry cabinet. Abidah et al. (2020) stated that Nadiem Makarim introduced a significant national education system policy change in December 2019. At the higher education level, he introduced the policy of *Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka* (Freedom of Learning – Campus of Freedom).

Meanwhile, for the primary and secondary education levels, Nadim made the following policies (Wajdi et al., 2020): (1) the abolishment of the National Standard based School Examination (Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional); (2) Removed the National Exam (NE) and replaced it with Minimum Assessment Competency and Character Survey; (3) One sheet of Lesson Plan ; (4) Loosen the Zoning Regulations for New Student Acceptance. In the agreement with the House of Representatives, the Ministry of Education will gradually implement these policies, starting only by 2021 (Abidah et al., 2020). However, it did not end the debate in society regarding the need to implement the national exam, including among educators. As before, society's views on the NE are divided into three categories: first, the NE should be preserved; second, the NE should be evaluated and refined; and third, the NE should be abolished.

National Education Policy in Response to Covid-19 Pandemic

Coronavirus Diseases (Covid-19) spreads globally and endangers human life, so on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Covid19 a pandemic (Abdullah, 2020). Formerly, coronavirus infected Wuhan, China, in December 2019 and spread rapidly throughout the world in early 2020. Coronavirus spreads through the medium of human physical contact. Therefore, WHO recommends several health protocols to prevent Covid-19 chain transmission. Physical distancing and avoiding public crowds are the most effective ways to prevent the massive spread of the coronavirus. The physical distancing leads to the cessation of public activities, including the closure of teaching and learning activities in schools and universities worldwide. The learning process shifted to technology-based online learning (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The first infection of Covid-19 in Indonesia was detected on March 2, 2020. President of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, formally announced it as a national disaster (Abdullah, 2020). Indonesia is the fourth most populous country in the world (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020), whereby the potential of Covid-19 spreading all over the country may take place fast and endanger the citizen's life. For the Indonesian education context, the Covid-19 pandemic have caused significant impacts on education policies previously enacted by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2019 (Djalante et al., 2020). As a matter of fact, in October 2019, Joko Widodo was re-elected as president for a second term (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). He then appointed Mohammad Nadiem Makarim, a young technocrat, as Minister of Education and Culture for his ministry cabinet. Abidah et al. (2020) noted Nadiem Makarim introduced significant change in national education system policy in December 2019. At the higher education level, he introduced the policy of *Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka* (Freedom of Learning – Campus of Freedom).

Meanwhile, for the primary and secondary education levels, Nadim made the following policies: (1) the abolishment of *Ujian Sekolah Berstandar Nasional* (National Standard based School Examination); (2) Abolish the National Examination (UN) and replaced it with Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey; (3) One sheet of Lesson Plan (Indonesia: *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran*); (4) Loosen the Zoning Regulations for New Student Acceptance (Abidah et al., 2020). These policies of the replacement of the National Exam with the Minimum Competency Assessment were supposed to be implemented gradually, starting only by the year 2021 (Megawati & Sutarto, 2021).

Due to the Coronavirus outbreak, these policy of MOEC need to be revised drastically to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia in early 2020. The most important policy was taken to prevent the transmission of Corona, in order is the abolition of the National Examination for primary, secondary, and higher levels education. The most critical impact of the change on national assessment and examination system policy was that it affected Indonesia's newly established Hindu faith-based schools' establishment, recognition, and assessment

system. The Ministry of Education and Culture policies mentioned above also posted similar consequences to the religious-based schools under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

V. Conclusion

The Indonesian government embraced the mono-religious education policy by giving financial and technical support to establish a faith-based school for six state-recognized religions in Indonesia. One of the implementations of this policy is the acknowledgment of Hindu faith-based schools named *Widya Pasraman*. *Widya Pasraman* provides Hindu religious education for the student at preschool, primary, secondary levels. Between 2016 and 2019 Indonesian Hindu community established *Widya Pasraman*, and for the first time in 2019, attended the National Exam administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The Covid-19 outbreak forced the Indonesian government to cancel the National Exam 2020 for primary and secondary schools. The cancelation of the 2020 National Exam and the change on national policy for students assessment in late 2019 significantly impact the procedure and the bureaucratic process for the newly established Hindu faith-based school recognition and student assessment system.

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