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Stand for Education: Dreaming of Equal Religious Education Rights for Minorities.

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Abstract *: Education is a fundamental right that must be fulfilled for all individuals, including minority groups. However, disparities in access to education still occur, particularly in religious education for minority students. This study examines the dynamics experienced by Buddhist students in Pejambon Village, where limited facilities and institutional support have hindered the fulfillment of their right to receive Buddhist religious education. The research aims to analyze the challenges faced by these students and the efforts undertaken to address the issue. This study employs a qualitative approach using interviews, observations, and document analysis to capture the experiences of Buddhist students, teachers, and community representatives. The findings reveal that this gap has persisted for a long period, primarily due to the shortage of Buddhist religious instructors and the lack of school openness in facilitating Buddhist religious education. As an alternative, religious instruction has been conducted at the vihara and through after-school religious lessons. The study recommends stronger involvement from school authorities and local education stakeholders to ensure inclusive educational policies and equitable access to religious education for all students.*

Keywords: *Education; Minority; Buddhist Students; Disparity*

INTRODUCTION

As the world continues to evolve, certain issues remain stagnant. The dynamics between majority and minority groups continue to draw special attention from various parties, including academics (Pelly, 1999). In a more specific context, certain ethnic or social groups often need to be acknowledged by the wider community in order to be recognized as equal entities within society (Huda, 2010). This tension extends into various social spaces where majority and minority groups intersect, one of which is the educational sphere, most visibly manifested within schools.

In a broader context, this condition can be understood as a form of social domination. The existence of social dominance orientation often reflects a tendency toward hierarchical structures that favor the superiority of one's own group over others ((Duckitt & Sibley, 2018; Prasetya & Tondok, 2023; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Furthermore, domination represents an asymmetric form of power,

in which dominated subjects experience a limited capacity to make autonomous decisions (Foucault, 1982; Kamahi, 2017). Such conditions lead to restrictions on access to information, ultimately producing inequalities in rights, opportunities, and freedoms among groups within society. Over time, these circumstances foster discriminatory attitudes, understood as differential treatment of individuals or groups based on their group identity or origin (Illiyy, 2015).

A number of studies on minorities and education have generally focused on regulatory and policy aspects, such as findings indicating that not all schools in Indonesia have implemented inclusive education principles (Hayyadin, Iyoh Masitoh, Farhan Muntafa, 2019) and that some schools still fail to provide religious education teachers in accordance with students' beliefs (Farihah & Izzati, 2016). These conditions demonstrate that disparities in formal education persist due to differences in social status, religion, and belief systems, which in turn influence variations in educational policies across regions. In fact, the state has a constitutional obligation to guarantee the fulfillment of the basic rights of all citizens as mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Undang-Undang Dasar 1945), as well as the principle of justice enshrined in Pancasila (Farihah & Izzati, 2016). Previous studies still leave a research gap, as they tend to emphasize normative and policy aspects, while studies that specifically examine students' individual experiences in obtaining educational rights and participating in learning processes at school remain relatively limited. Therefore, this study focuses on students' experiences in accessing their right to education as an effort to address the existing gap in the literature. To clarify and sharpen the analysis, this research limits its scope by concentrating on empirical realities observed in the field. In this context, the study is directed toward the phenomenon of education for minority groups in Pejambon Village as the research site. This focus is intended to understand how school policies are translated into practice and how they affect the fulfillment of educational rights for students from religious minority groups.

This paper builds upon the aforementioned theoretical concepts to examine the lived reality of how Buddhist communities in Pejambon Village aspire to achieve their right to equal education within schools. At the same time, these concepts provide an analytical framework to explore the possibilities for creating equitable and inclusive education for all members of society, including the Buddhist minority in Pejambon Village. Variations in local education policies inevitably affect how schools operate. Considering these issues, this paper narrows its scope to explore one specific case related to education and minority groups in Pejambon Village, where the research was conducted. Grounded in both societal and institutional realities as described above, this study examines how issues of minority status and institutional authority within education can be analyzed through an anthropological lens, particularly within the framework of educational anthropology, a subfield that has yet to find a solid position within the broader discipline of social and cultural studies. By employing an anthropological perspective, the research seeks to provide a closer and clearer understanding of the cultural conflicts and dynamics that permeate the subculture of education.

This introduction provides an initial explanation of the experiences of Buddhist students in obtaining learning opportunities within the school environment. This study is expected to contribute academically to understanding the dynamics of social interaction, particularly those related to minority groups in the context of formal education. Furthermore, this research is also expected to enrich studies on multiculturalism and inclusive education by presenting the perspectives of religious minority groups that have so far been relatively underrepresented in educational discourse. More specifically, the novelty of the article lies in shifting attention from the formal existence of educational regulations to the lived experiences of minority students when those regulations are implemented at school. By placing students' experiences, institutional responses, and community-based alternatives within the same analytical frame, the study seeks to show how equality in religious education is negotiated in everyday educational practice. Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to analyze the challenges Buddhist students face in obtaining religious education and the efforts undertaken to secure more equitable access.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a qualitative research employing an anthropological approach that focuses on religious phenomena. Issues related to religion can be understood as phenomena that have consistently been present throughout human history. The study of religious phenomena in this research is positioned from a perspective that goes beyond viewing religion solely as a theological domain; instead, religion is examined as a lived experience embedded in everyday social life and manifested in the daily practices of the community.

The data used in this study were derived from research conducted in 2020, in which one specific topic from the original undergraduate thesis is further elaborated in the present article. The objective of this research is to examine and analyze the phenomenon of educational inequality experienced by the Buddhist community in Pejambon Village, where some Buddhist students at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school levels have not fully received their rights to religious education at school. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach. In the process of data collection, an ethnographic approach was employed to provide a cultural explanation of the phenomenon and to gain an in-depth understanding of the community's worldview from their own perspectives (Spradley, 1997). Following the stages of observation and the selection of informants, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews and ethnographic interviews to obtain a wide range of information, including hidden transcripts that emerged through informal conversations with informants. In ethnographic research, data collection is not determined by the number of informants but by the accuracy and richness of the information obtained (Spradley, 1997).

RESEARCH RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Exploring the Issue of Religious Education Rights in Pejambon Village

Blessed are those who are born, raised, and grow up in cities. Why so? With abundant and easy access to various resources, they can freely obtain what they desire. This privilege is especially evident in the field of education, where a clear gap can be observed between urban and rural, or more isolated areas far from city centers (Vito & Krisnani, 2015). For urban residents, the fulfillment of educational needs is rarely a challenge. The proliferation of schools from elementary to senior high levels, both public and private, religious and non-religious, reflects the accessibility and abundance of educational facilities in cities. These schools are often well-equipped, easily reachable, and student-friendly. For example, the infrastructure, transportation, and learning facilities are generally well-established.

This reality stands in stark contrast to the conditions found in many rural areas. The village becomes an inseparable variable in discussions of educational disparity. Students in rural areas must struggle to access proper education, often facing multiple challenges like a difficult access to schools, inadequate infrastructure, limited learning resources, a shortage of qualified teachers, and, for some, the added burden of economic hardship.

As mentioned earlier, this paper extends and deepens the discussion on minority groups in Pejambon Village (Khodori, 2020), the site of the author's undergraduate research on interreligious harmony, which has long been part of the village's historical and social fabric. The issue presented here is both significant and compelling for at least two reasons. First, education which is expected to serve as a means for villagers to transform their lives has not yet provided equitable access or fair treatment, particularly in the fulfillment of students' rights. Second, the system of religious education remains highly exclusive. Students who do not belong to the majority religion (Islam) are confronted with two equally difficult choices: either continue attending Islamic religious classes or not receive any religious education at all.

Ultimately, many of these students choose to remain in class and participate in Islamic religious lessons until the session ends. Such experiences are shared by students from elementary to senior high school levels in Pejambon Village. Those who adhere to different faiths such as Buddhism and Christianity, must reluctantly accept that their right to receive religious education aligned with their beliefs remains unfulfilled.

Based on statistical data, the number of Buddhist students in Pejambon Village is relatively small. In 2020, there were 10 students at the elementary level, 6 at the junior high level, and 6 at the senior high level. Due to this small number, these students have received limited attention from schools, particularly regarding the educational facilities and services available to them (Khodori, 2020).

One of the persistent problems is that Buddhist students do not receive their right to religious education at school. Observational data indicate that this issue stems from the lack of qualified Buddhist religious teachers within the local education system. According to Winarmi, a Buddhist religious instructor who also serves as a teacher of Buddhist studies, there are currently only two Buddhist teachers available, one teaching at the elementary school and the other at the junior high school. This limited number of educators has made it difficult for schools to provide regular and structured religious education for Buddhist students.

> *''Untuk pengajar di sekolah memang ga banyak mun, kalo di SD sudah ada satu itu juga belum lama, kalo di SMP saya sendiri yang ngajar nah kalo di SMA murid-murid ibu malah yang ga dapat pelajaran agama.'' (Interview with Winarmi)*

All Buddhist students currently enrolled in schools are residents of Pejambon Village. According to Winarmi, this is somewhat reassuring, as it allows her to continue providing religious instruction to the students outside formal school settings. She does so by holding additional Buddhist lessons after worship sessions at the Vihara (temple).

At the elementary school level, Buddhist religious instruction is scheduled to coincide with the regular Islamic religious education classes at school. Meanwhile, at the junior high school level, the class schedule follows the school's internal policy, every Friday afternoon, once a week, after school hours. However, according to Winarmi, this arrangement is less effective due to both the limited amount of time allocated and occasional conflicts with her teaching schedule at other institutions. To address this challenge, she has initiated supplementary classes at the Vihara, allowing students to receive additional religious education beyond what is available in school.

> *''Biar tetep dapet pelajaran agama Buddha jadinya ibu mengajar mereka secara langsung pas sudah selesai sembahayang di Vihara. Semuanya jadi satu, jadi dari yang masih SD sampai SMA semua ibu ajarin di vihara.'' (Winarmi).*

Based on observations and interviews with several school representatives, it was found that Buddhist students do not receive religious instruction because there are no Buddhist religious teachers in these schools. As a result, Buddhist students are forced to attend Islamic religion classes alongside their Muslim peers, while some simply sit in class without receiving any lessons. This issue has persisted for a long time and has not received serious attention from the school authorities. Although the state guarantees freedom of religion and the right to practice one's faith, in practice, there is no religious or spiritual guidance provided for Buddhist students in schools. This indirectly indicates that schools have been too passive, assuming there are no problems concerning Buddhist students.

From the teachers' perspective, the situation reflects a lack of optimal performance in fulfilling their pedagogical roles. On one hand, some teachers do not fully prioritize the learning development of non-Muslim students due to

differences in religious beliefs. On the other hand, teachers are expected to foster students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities while maintaining tolerance toward religious diversity in the classroom. The participation of Buddhist students in Islamic religion classes can be seen as a form of compliance with school regulations. However, this condition often causes anxiety among parents, who fear it may affect their children's faith.

According to the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 16 of 2010, Articles 3 and 4 outline the obligations of schools to manage religious education. Article 3 paragraph (2) states that: "Every student in school has the right to receive religious education in accordance with their religion and to be taught by a teacher of the same faith". The regulation further details the implementation and management of religious education, including requirements such as the minimum number of students needed for a religion class to be held. This raises several questions: Has this regulation been properly implemented? Does it take into account variables such as the school's location—whether in urban or rural areas?

Ideally, the provision of religious education services is a mandatory responsibility of schools. Every student has the right to receive religious education in accordance with their faith. The constitution explicitly guarantees that every student in any educational institution has the right to such instruction. Therefore, every school is obliged to provide religious education services according to the religion embraced by each student. In reality, however, not all schools have fulfilled this obligation, as seen in the case of Pejambon Village. Although Pejambon has various educational institutions from early childhood (PAUD), kindergarten (TK), elementary (SD), junior high (SMP), to senior high school (SMA), not all of them have met the students' right to receive religious education.

This situation has also affected the psychological well-being of Buddhist students. The problems identified include the lack of facilities for Buddhist students and the absence of religious freedom within the school environment. Based on field observations and interviews, such issues have appeared since elementary school, where students of different faiths, Muslims as the majority and Buddhists as the minority sometimes mock each other's beliefs. As they enter junior and senior high school, many Buddhist students experience discriminatory treatment from both teachers and peers, leading some of them to feel less confident about their religious identity.

> *"Ada saja mun yang dialami sama murid-murid ibu, yang lumayan kaget ya itu pas dia diajak gurunya buat masuk Islam, ibu juga kaget toh masa di sekolahan ada guru yang kayak gitu. Jadinya ibu ngobrol langsung sama dia dan orangtuanya biar ga jadi membesar persoalannya" (Winarmi).*

An incident in 2020 revealed an act of religious intervention toward a Buddhist female student at a public senior high school in Pejambon Village. A teacher reportedly made persuasive efforts that led the student to develop an interest in converting to Islam, even inviting her to recite the shahada (the Islamic declaration of faith) at school. This situation shocked both the student's family and the local

Buddhist religious instructors' community, especially since no prior communication had been made with the student's parents regarding the teacher's invitation.

According to Winarmi, Buddhist students generally feel more comfortable and confident sharing their personal concerns with Buddhist religious counselors and their families rather than with teachers or classmates at school. This may be due to the closer emotional connection and the higher level of trust they place in religious figures and family members, who are perceived as more understanding and supportive in addressing the issues they face.

Between Belief and Access: Buddhist Educational Dynamics in Pejambon Village

This section discusses the central theme, the intersection between education and minority groups. In principle, educational institutions are mandated to provide equal access and opportunities for all students without favoritism or discrimination. Raewyn Connell asserts that "An education that privileges one child over another is giving the privileged child a corrupted education, even as it gives him or her a social or economic advantage." (Connel, 1998). This statement reinforces the essential role of schools as inclusive institutions that must nurture and serve all learners equally. The Indonesian Constitution, which regulates the national education system, explicitly states that educational services must be delivered without discrimination. Furthermore, the government bears the responsibility to ensure accessibility, quality, and equality in education for every citizen.

As previously discussed, the educational conditions in Pejambon Village reveal a unique dynamic experienced by Buddhist students. These dynamics are primarily related to their limited access to religious education, which remains unfulfilled in many cases. Findings from interviews and observations indicate a sense of powerlessness among Buddhist students in facing this educational reality. At the same time, the participation of Buddhist students in Islamic religious classes reflects a form of compliance with school regulations. However, this compliance is accompanied by a sense of coercion, as families permit their children to join Islamic lessons to fulfill administrative requirements and avoid potential academic disadvantages. This situation illustrates the limited agency of both students and their families, who face few alternatives for obtaining religious education aligned with their faith. Consequently, their participation in Islamic classes represents not only conformity but also a lack of viable educational choices that accommodate their religious identity.

This situation exemplifies the dominance of hegemonic power within the educational sphere. Drawing on Michel Foucault's (1982) concept, power does not reside solely within the state; rather, it is dispersed among various institutions and actors capable of shaping thought, belief, and behavior. Such mechanisms result

in what Foucault terms the institutionalization of power; a system of legal, political, and social structures that preserve dominance and ensure the reproduction of obedience (Foucault, 1982)

Foucault's framework of power and discourse offers a critical perspective for understanding educational practices in modern societies. The notion of education as an instrument of social transformation highlights the intricate relationship between knowledge, power, and ideology (Martono, 2012). Ideally, schools should not function merely as sites that render students passive objects of control, but rather as inclusive and dialogical spaces that promote equality, diversity, and mutual respect. When educational institutions prioritize the interests of dominant groups, such as enforcing uniform religious instruction or embedding bias within curricula, they risk perpetuating systemic inequality (Farihah & Izzati, 2016; McGregor & Marker, 2018).

Toward Inclusive and Equitable Religious Education

The case of Pejambon Village underscores an unfinished struggle to recognize and embrace diversity. The lack of comprehensive acknowledgment of religious and cultural differences reveals an imbalance, not only in the freedom to practice one's faith but also in the respect accorded to minority groups within social and educational life. Persistent inequalities in formal education, particularly along religious and socio-economic lines, contribute to disparities in policy implementation and educational outcomes. These disparities hinder equitable access to education and exacerbate broader patterns of social inequality (Herlina, 2019; Zakiyah, 2018).

To address these challenges, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is essential, one that recognizes diversity as a fundamental principle of education and ensures that all learners, regardless of their background, have access to quality learning opportunities. Some efforts have been made in Pejambon Village, such as providing Buddhist religious education at local viharas and conducting supplementary lessons after school hours. These initiatives serve as pragmatic responses to the shortage of Buddhist religious teachers. However, they remain partial and insufficient, highlighting the need for stronger institutional commitment and policy intervention.

Meaningful educational transformation requires collaboration among all stakeholders; including schools, communities, and government authorities (Rembangy Musthofa, 2010). Only through such collective engagement can Indonesia move toward an educational system that is genuinely inclusive, equitable, and reflective of its pluralistic society.

CONCLUSION

The issue of the right to receive religious education experienced by Buddhist students in Pejambon Village highlights the school's failure to provide a complete educational component, both in terms of curriculum and teaching

personnel. This situation is particularly concerning since the high school located in Pejambon Village is the only easily accessible educational institution in the area. The lack of sensitivity and slow response from the school has turned what should be an academic space for learning into a form of confinement for those who happen to belong to a minority group. The slow and ineffective efforts of the school have only made it more difficult for these students to gain clarity and assurance about their educational rights.

This phenomenon offers a broader reflection on Indonesia's education system, especially in rural areas such as Pejambon Village. Educational inequality continues to persist, particularly for those belonging to religious minorities. Disparities, injustices, and subtle forms of coercion are still felt by individuals who carry a minority identity. Furthermore, the discussion of educational rights in this paper focuses primarily on minority groups within the six officially recognized religions in Indonesia: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. It does not yet extend to other forms of minority belief systems such as local indigenous faiths, including Sunda Wiwitan, Kaharingan, and other indigenous religions. Although addressing this issue is by no means simple, neglecting it can escalate into a more serious problem if not handled promptly and appropriately. In the specific context of Pejambon Village, the issue of unequal access to religious education has persisted for quite some time. Collaboration among multiple stakeholders, particularly the government, represented by the Department of Education, the schools, and the local community is essential in finding a solution that could help restore the image of Indonesian education as inclusive and equitable. Strengthened cooperation between the Department of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and local religious leaders should be established to ensure the fulfillment of every student's right to religious education.

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