

# **Bridging Faith Boundaries: Perspectives of Islamic Religious Education Teachers on Visits to Non-Muslim Places of Worship**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the attitudes of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in Ciamis District, Indonesia, concerning student visits to non-Muslim places of worship. Employing a qualitative research methodology, specifically through in-depth interviews, we sought to capture the nuanced perspectives of these educators. Our findings reveal that the preponderant majority of teachers hold a positive outlook on such visits. They generally permit these educational excursions, provided that the visits are explicitly geared towards educational objectives and that students are deemed sufficiently mature to grasp religious diversity and are prepared to foster peaceful coexistence. These insights are particularly salient for educational institutions, offering a tangible framework for designing and implementing interfaith engagements that extend beyond mere theoretical instruction. Critically, this research underscores the potential of these carefully curated visits to cultivate a profound sense of tolerance and mutual understanding among students towards faiths distinct from their own. More broadly, the findings carry significant implications for curriculum development in religious education, suggesting a pedagogical shift towards experiential learning that directly addresses issues of religious pluralism and social harmony. Furthermore, they highlight the pivotal role of teacher disposition in shaping student attitudes toward diversity, offering a compelling case for professional development initiatives that support nuanced approaches to religious tolerance in increasingly diverse societies.

## **Abstrak**

Studi ini meneliti sikap guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di Kecamatan Ciamis, Indonesia, terkait kunjungan siswa ke tempat-tempat ibadah non-Muslim. Dengan menerapkan metodologi penelitian kualitatif, khususnya melalui wawancara mendalam, kami berupaya menangkap perspektif nuansial dari para pendidik ini. Temuan kami menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas besar guru memiliki pandangan positif terhadap kunjungan semacam itu. Mereka umumnya mengizinkan kunjungan edukatif ini, dengan syarat bahwa kunjungan tersebut secara eksplisit diarahkan untuk tujuan pendidikan dan bahwa siswa dianggap cukup matang untuk

memahami perbedaan agama serta siap untuk menumbuhkan koeksistensi damai. Wawasan ini sangat relevan bagi institusi pendidikan, menawarkan kerangka kerja yang nyata untuk merancang dan mengimplementasikan kegiatan lintas agama yang melampaui sekadar instruksi teoretis. Secara krusial, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi potensi kunjungan yang dikurasi dengan cermat ini untuk menumbuhkan rasa toleransi dan saling pengertian yang mendalam di kalangan siswa terhadap keyakinan yang berbeda dari agama yang mereka anut. Lebih luas lagi, temuan ini membawa implikasi signifikan bagi pengembangan kurikulum dalam pendidikan agama, menunjukkan pergeseran pedagogis menuju pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman yang secara langsung membahas isu-isu pluralisme agama dan harmoni sosial. Selanjutnya, temuan ini menyoroti peran penting disposisi guru dalam membentuk sikap siswa terhadap keragaman, memberikan argumen yang kuat untuk inisiatif pengembangan profesional yang mendukung pendekatan bernuansa terhadap toleransi beragama dalam masyarakat yang semakin beragam.

**Keywords:** Faith boundaries, Islamic religious education teachers, non-Muslim places of worship

## INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental environment for individuals' holistic growth and development, encompassing both their physical and spiritual dimensions (Barnadib, 2002). However, the journey toward achieving educational objectives is frequently impeded by an array of intricate challenges. Among the most persistently debated controversies in the realm of education is the pervasive issue of intolerance. This phenomenon of intolerance is notably categorized as one of three major transgressions, alongside bullying and sexual violence (Maulana, 2017). Intolerance manifests in various forms, including racism, sexism, religious discrimination, and other prejudicial behaviors. Its detrimental impacts are substantial, leading to a lack of comfort and security, inciting fragmentation, fostering negative prejudices, impeding institutional progress, eroding national unity, and diminishing a sense of fraternity.

Religious discrimination stands out as a widely discussed manifestation of intolerance (Husni & Bisri, 2024). This form of discrimination typically originates from prejudices or negative sentiments that prompt individuals to act distinctly towards other groups. This occurs despite Indonesia's official recognition of six religions: Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Maksum, 2011). The state guarantees each adherent the freedom to practice their religion and worship according to their respective doctrines and beliefs, as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution (Ramadani et al., 2024).

Religious scholars and intellectuals in Indonesia have proposed numerous theories concerning religious tolerance. Broadly, these theories can be summarized into two main aspects: firstly, the 'concept of harmony,' which involves theological explanations of each religious doctrine; and secondly, the 'dialogue' among scholars, actualized through formal inter-institutional relations (Shofwan & Maknun, 2023). Nevertheless, these formal inter-institutional relationships have largely remained ceremonial rather than reaching a conceptual level. The advent of the "reform order" exposed weaknesses in the established and publicized concept of religious harmony. It became apparent that this concept operated more as a "security" approach than one driven by "awareness". Consequently, practical religious dialogue must stem from religious consciousness, as this awareness is cultivated through religious knowledge and experience (Ghazali, 2024).

Incidents of violence perpetrated in the name of religion fundamentally contradict the principles of human coexistence. Such occurrences are often attributed to partial religious understanding, conflicts over the establishment of places of worship, and an unpreparedness for peaceful coexistence, all of which contribute to intolerance. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding is imperative to accommodate and rectify notions that conflict with the common good for the sustainability of religious life. Concerted and deliberate efforts from various stakeholders are necessary to resolve religiously motivated conflicts, as failure to address them seriously could result in immense economic, social, political, and material losses for the Indonesian nation.

Comprehensive understanding can be fostered through educational institutions, as they inherently serve as spaces where differences and diversity converge. This environment facilitates robust social interaction. Schools, in particular, should function as neutral learning environments that uphold unity within diversity. Despite this ideal, schools are, in reality, often susceptible to contamination by attitudes of intolerance and radicalism (Ansori, 2020).

The enhancement of educational quality is a consequential endeavor, especially in the delivery of knowledge within educational institutions (Sormin et al., 2022). Consequently, educators must exhibit creativity and innovation to deliver high-quality education. One effective strategy involves implementing exploratory activities, designed to enable students to observe the practical application of theoretical concepts being studied (Luna & Winters, 2024). Such exploration often entails visiting sites relevant to the learning material, a method commonly referred to as a field trip. In essence, the field trip method involves educators taking students to a location to directly observe processes or subjects under study (Bola, 2024).

Therefore, to instill a sense of tolerance or mitigate intolerance, particularly concerning religious discrimination, it is imperative to

implement exploratory learning that involves visiting non-Muslim places of worship to gain a more comprehensive understanding. However, not all teachers share the same attitude toward student visits to non-Muslim places of worship. Some educators hold skeptical views or even reject this method due to concerns about students' creed (*aqidah*), ideological considerations, political implications, or a perceived lack of understanding of their own religion.

An illustrative case highlighting concerns about student visits to non-Muslim places of worship involved a visit by students from SMPN 5 Ciamis to a "harmony village". This visit drew considerable criticism, with some arguing that it was inappropriate given the students' impressionable age. For instance, the head of Ciamis Regency MUI, KH Saeful Ujun, stated to reporters on Monday (30/10/2023), "Looking at the condition of elementary, junior high, and senior high school students whose beliefs, faith, and trust are still unstable, it is not yet time to provide such religious comparisons". Consequently, this research aims to investigate the attitudes of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Ciamis District regarding student visits to non-Muslim places of worship.

## **METHODS**

The research methodology employed in this study is a qualitative approach. This approach was selected because the investigation pertains to the subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors. In such research contexts, the findings are shaped by the insights and impressions of the researcher. This type of research approach yields non-quantitative results, or outcomes not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. Commonly, techniques such as focus group interviews, projective techniques, and in-depth interviews are utilized in this approach.

The subjects of this research were Islamic Religious Education teachers in Ciamis District. The data collection technique involved in-depth interviews with three participants from different educational institutions. The researchers conducted these in-depth interviews to gather participants' opinions and experiences. The interview data were then analyzed qualitatively using a thematic phenomenological approach. Several key themes were identified and analyzed to comprehend the relationships and patterns emerging from the qualitative data. This analysis provided insights into the attitudes of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Ciamis District regarding student visits to non-Muslim places of worship.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In confronting various educational challenges, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers must adopt a sagacious attitude, aligning with the

guidance of the Al-Quran and As-Sunnah. This is crucial for their demeanor to serve as an exemplary model for students, thereby facilitating the successful attainment of educational objectives. Attitudes are acquired characteristics that shape an individual's reactions to situations and influence what they seek in life. An attitude comprises three components: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. It is inherently linked to an object, and the attitude towards this object is accompanied by either positive or negative feelings. A teacher's attitude is a pivotal factor in the subsequent psychological development of students. This is because a teacher's attitude is observed not merely during instructional periods but also through their daily conduct by their students.

According to Renninger & Hidi (2019), attitude represents a person's covert reaction or process towards a stimulus or object. Attitudes cannot be directly observed; rather, they must first be inferred from an individual's covert behaviors. Fundamentally, an attitude signifies a consistent reaction to a particular stimulus. In everyday life, attitudes are often characterized as emotional responses to social stimuli.

The term PAI is frequently associated with Islamic education (PI), yet these two concepts possess essential differences. PI refers to an entity or setting that implements systems, rules, or leadership based on Islamic principles. In contrast, PAI primarily emphasizes the process of clearly explaining and fostering understanding of Islam. In essence, while PI focuses on the system, PAI highlights the methodology of teaching and learning, with an emphasis on the learning process itself. An educator is designated as a PAI teacher because their core responsibility lies in their ability to facilitate students' appropriate and proportional comprehension and application of Islamic teachings. The process of knowing, understanding, and applying knowledge is not immediate; it necessitates a mature, prolonged, continuous, or systematic approach. Consequently, a conscious effort is required to develop human potential comprehensively, enabling Islam to serve as a solution to societal challenges.

Furthermore, PAI teachers must grasp the fundamental principles of pedagogy. These principles include: a) the ability to engage students with lesson material and effectively utilize diverse learning media and resources; b) the capacity to inspire students' active thinking, encouraging them to seek and discover knowledge independently ; c) proficiency in sequencing subject matter and adapting it to students' age and developmental stages ; d) the skill to connect new lessons with students' existing knowledge, thereby facilitating comprehension ; e) the imperative to reiterate material for enhanced student understanding ; f) the obligation to consider the correlations between subjects or their practical relevance in daily life ; g) the necessity to sustain student concentration by providing opportunities for direct experience, observation, research, and the synthesis of acquired knowledge ; h) the responsibility to cultivate students' social relationships both within and outside the classroom ; and i) the duty

to investigate and understand individual student differences to provide tailored support .

### *Visits to Non-Muslim Places of Worship*

The term "pariwisata" is often associated with tourism. "Pariwisata," derived from Sanskrit, combines "pari," meaning "full," and "wisata," signifying "journey". In its broader sense, tourism encompasses all phenomena, manifestations, and relationships stemming from an individual's travel or temporary stay for diverse objectives. Etymologically, "pari" denotes "many," "repeatedly," or "over and over," while "wisata" means "travel" or "going on a journey," thus defining tourism as recurring journeys from one location to another (Setiawan, 2023).

In English, "tourism" originates from "tour," which also implies a journey. The Cambridge Dictionary defines tourism as "the business of providing services such as transport, places to stay, or entertainment for people who are on holiday" (Audi, 1999). From these definitions, tourism can be understood as an activity of travel or movement between different places with various aims. More comprehensively, tourism represents a temporary process of travel by one or more individuals to a location outside their usual residence, driven by a wide array of interests, including economic, social, cultural, political, religious, health, educational, or simply curiosity (Hornby, 1973).

The permissibility of visits to non-Muslim places of worship has been a subject of discussion among Islamic legal scholars (*fuqaha*). The various perspectives established by these scholars on this matter are contingent upon the visitor's intention, as articulated in the *qaidah fiqhiyah* (Islamic legal maxims) (Salim, 2015; Zakariyah, 2010). *Qaidah fiqhiyah* serves as a fundamental component in the application of Islamic law. The interpretation of *qaidah fiqhiyah* in the practical application of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) naturally varies due to differing contexts, encompassing variations in time, location, and issues such as cultural norms, advancements in knowledge, and dissimilar prevailing conditions. Through these *qaidah fiqhiyah*, individuals can adopt a more moderate approach in addressing ongoing and evolving societal challenges. The maxim "الامور بمقاصدها" (*al-umuru bi maqashidiha*), meaning "matters are judged by their intentions," is central to this scholarly work, specifically examining the concept of intention. The position of intention holds paramount importance in determining the nature of a person's action (Shettima et al., 2016).

The maxim of *al-umuru bi maqashidiha* is a *qaidah* (legal maxim) with broad implications, as it pertains to all human activities, encompassing both verbal expressions and physical actions. This maxim also addresses the risks and consequences associated with every matter, emphasizing that these must align with the intended purpose of the action (the underlying intention). This foundational *qaidah* is composed of two

elements: *al-umuru* and *al-maqasid*. Etymologically, *al-umuru* refers to states, necessities, events, and actions, while *al-maqasid* denotes purpose or objective. Terminologically, it signifies the actions and deeds of a *mukallaf* (a legally competent individual in Islamic law), whether through speech or conduct, that are subject to *sharia* law and are consistent with what is performed (Kamali, 2021).

Intention holds a crucial position, and its legal purposes are manifold. These include: a) enabling the distinction between acts of worship and customary practices or habits; b) serving as a differentiator between good and bad deeds; and c) determining the validity of an action and distinguishing between obligatory and supererogatory acts of worship.

The actions performed by a Muslim are fundamentally linked to intention, as the essence of intention within an individual's heart profoundly determines the moral quality of the action undertaken. Islamic jurists (*fuqaha*) hold varying opinions regarding the categorization of intention. Imam Abu Hanifah and Ahmad ibn Hanbal consider intention as a prerequisite for an action, whereas Imam Shafi'i regards it as an integral pillar (*rukun*) of the action (Al-Alwani, 2003). A prerequisite is a stipulation that a *mukallaf* must fulfill prior to the performance of an action, while a pillar is a mandatory element that must be executed as part of the action itself.

Based on the views of scholars concerning this issue, their opinions on its legal ruling differ. The majority of scholars from the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali schools of thought concur that it is forbidden (*haram*) for a Muslim to enter a non-Muslim place of worship when religious rituals are actively being performed inside. Conversely, if no religious rituals are taking place within the non-Muslim house of worship, the majority of scholars hold differing views on the matter. Some scholars permit it, others deem it reprehensible (*makruh*), and a segment prohibits it absolutely. This particular topic inherently raises numerous questions, given the contemporary interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims, as Muslims do not exclusively live among fellow Muslims but also alongside people of different faiths, cultural backgrounds, and even places of worship (Al-Zuhaily, 1985).

A review of classical *fiqh* literature reveals a divergence of opinions among scholars regarding the permissibility of a Muslim entering non-Muslim places of worship, such as churches, monasteries, and synagogues. Firstly, scholars of the Hanafi school of thought state that entering non-Muslim places of worship is *makruh* (reprehensible). Shaykh Ibn Abidin, in his book *Radd al Muhtar ala al-Durr al Mukhtar*, mentions: يُكْرَهُ لِلْمُسْلِمِ الدُّخُولُ فِي الْبَيْعَةِ وَالْكَنِيسَةِ. This translates to: "For a Muslim, entering synagogues and churches is *makruh*". Consistent with Ibn Abidin, Shaykh Ibn Nujaim Al-Mishry, in his book *Al-Bahr al Ra'iq Syarh Kanzu al-Daqaiq*, asserts: وَالظَّاهِرُ أَنَّهَا تَحْرِيمِيَّةٌ. يُكْرَهُ لِلْمُسْلِمِ الدُّخُولُ فِي الْبَيْعَةِ وَالْكَنِيسَةِ. This

means: "For a Muslim, entering synagogues and churches is *makruh*. And apparently, it is *makruh tahrim* (approaching prohibition)". Secondly, the majority of scholars, including those from the Maliki, Hanbali, and some from the Shafi'i schools of thought, state that a Muslim is permitted to enter non-Muslim places of worship (Auda, 2014).

*Attitudes of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Ciamis District Towards Student Visits to Non-Muslim Places of Worship*

The geographical area of Ciamis Regency is situated between 108°19' and 108°42' East Longitude and 7°40'20" and 7°41'20" South Latitude. The northernmost sub-district is Sukamantri, located at 7.082 South Latitude; the westernmost is Cihaurbeuti, at 108.202 East Longitude; the southernmost is Pamarican, at 7.461 South Latitude; and the easternmost is Lakbok, at 108.682 East Longitude. Ciamis Regency borders Majalengka Regency and Kuningan Regency to the north, Tasikmalaya Regency and Tasikmalaya City to the west, Banjar City and Central Java Province to the east, and Pangandaran Regency to the south. The total area of Ciamis Regency spans 143,387 hectares.

The religious life of the Ciamis community is deeply imbued with humanitarian values. For them, preserving togetherness is of paramount importance. The commitment to communal values in their social, national, and state life is strongly ingrained in every individual citizen of Ciamis. The Ciamis community prioritizes living in harmony, disregarding differences in religious backgrounds and beliefs. Notably, a Muslim individual in Susuru Village participates in Christmas celebrations at the church, and conversely, when the Muslim community in the village celebrates Eid al-Fitr or Eid al-Adha, residents from other faiths in Susuru Village mingle with them to celebrate and extend greetings to those observing the holidays. While such phenomena might be considered commonplace in urban societies with heterogeneous and multicultural structures, for communities at the village level, such occurrences are remarkably exceptional and rarely found elsewhere, particularly within the Ciamis region. This unique context captivated the researchers' interest to delve deeper into the attitudes of Islamic Religious Education teachers in Ciamis, specifically in Ciamis District, towards student visits to non-Muslim places of worship.

The following are the results of interviews with several PAI teachers in Ciamis District regarding their attitudes towards student visits to non-Muslim places of worship: First is the attitude expressed by Solihin Susanto, S.Pd., as the Head of a *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school). He stated:

"In our *pesantren*, we have visited Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple with the aim of introducing their history, the local economy, and culture, but only for high school students. Those below high school age are not permitted because it is not yet the right time."

Based on the explanation above, he permits students to visit non-Muslim places of worship if the intention is solely for educational purposes, covering aspects such as history or other education-related dimensions. This allowance is exclusively for students of at least high school age, as younger students are not permitted due to their potentially unstable creed (*aqidah*) and ideology. Conversely, he emphasized that visits driven by intentions unrelated to education are not permissible.

Mr. Solihin Susanto's rationale for not permitting visits for students below high school age is partly based on neurological research by Benjamin S. Bloom, an education expert from the University of Chicago, USA. Bloom indicated that brain cell growth in children aged 0-4 years reaches 50%, and up to 80% by age 8. This rapid brain development coincides with the child's physical growth, necessitating that parents and teachers provide stimulation for optimal development. Furthermore, in cognitive theory, understanding is not solely about intellectual capacity, but also inextricably involves feelings, emotions, and volition. This theory aligns with Benjamin S. Bloom's taxonomy in education, where educational objectives must encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Second is the attitude expressed by Yahya, S.Pd., a PAI teacher in Ciamis District. He stated:

“In our institution, we have visited Borobudur Temple and Prambanan Temple with the purpose of introducing social aspects of the community, their economy, history, and culture. We always provide initial education that our visit is for learning purposes, and we even obtain a letter of consent from parents or guardians beforehand.”

Yahya, S.Pd., are largely congruent. However, Mr. Yahya, S.Pd., explicitly added that obtaining a letter of consent from parents or guardians is mandatory before the excursion. This requirement is understandable, considering that a child's initial educational exposure often originates from the family, specifically from both parents. The education imparted can take formal forms, such as that provided in schools or educational institutions, or non-formal forms within the family environment. This family-based education, when delivered with appropriate and effective methodologies, can encompass practices like habituation, role modeling, wisdom, advice, lessons, praise, warnings, as well as parental commands and prohibitions.

Thirdly, Yani Safariah, S.Pd., also a PAI teacher in Ciamis District, conveyed her perspective:

"Visiting non-Muslim places of worship is permissible with good intentions, without any aim to participate in their religious rituals. However, it would be highly beneficial to visit historical sites related to our own religion before going to non-Muslim places of worship, so that we may be more grateful for living under the guidance of Islam."

From this statement, it is evident that she adopts a positive approach, permitting students to visit non-Muslim places of worship. Nevertheless,

she strongly advocates for all educational institutions to prioritize visits to Islamic historical sites. Her rationale is that deeper understanding of one's own faith would facilitate the adoption of a moderate stance.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and discussions presented in the preceding sections, it can be concluded that teachers in Ciamis District possess a clear understanding of the appropriate conduct to be observed when students visit non-Muslim places of worship. The teachers' perceptions regarding learning, religious moderation, and religious tolerance are largely consistent. They emphasize the importance of adopting a balanced attitude, avoiding mutual condemnation or conflict arising solely from differences. It is posited that a profound understanding of one's own religion fosters a harmonious life, free from conflicts that could lead to disunity.

These findings carry several significant implications for educational practice and policy, particularly in contexts characterized by religious diversity. Firstly, the demonstrated understanding among PAI teachers in Ciamis regarding interfaith visits suggests a promising foundation for integrating experiential learning about religious pluralism into formal curricula. This approach could move beyond theoretical instruction to foster genuine appreciation and respect for diverse faiths. Secondly, the emphasis on religious moderation and tolerance by these educators underscores the critical role of teacher training and professional development. Programs designed to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding could further strengthen this positive disposition, ensuring that they are well-equipped to guide students through complex discussions about religious differences. Thirdly, the recognition that a deep understanding of one's own faith contributes to tolerance implies that religious education curricula should not only focus on intra-faith knowledge but also on how this knowledge can inform respectful engagement with other belief systems.

Arising from these implications, several recommendations can be proposed. Educational authorities in Indonesia, and similar contexts, should consider developing comprehensive guidelines and resources for facilitating student visits to diverse places of worship. These guidelines should clearly outline pedagogical objectives, ethical considerations, and strategies for pre- and post-visit discussions to maximize learning outcomes and minimize potential misunderstandings. Furthermore, it is recommended that teacher education programs, particularly for religious education instructors, incorporate modules focused on interfaith understanding, conflict resolution in diverse religious settings, and practical methodologies for fostering tolerance through experiential learning. Finally, schools are encouraged to create dedicated platforms for structured interfaith dialogues and collaborative projects that bring

students from different religious backgrounds together. Such initiatives, grounded in a clear understanding of religious principles and guided by well-prepared educators, could play a vital role in nurturing a generation committed to harmonious coexistence in increasingly pluralistic societies.

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### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

The authors assert the absence of any conflict of interest. We affirm that the manuscript is original and is not presently under review by any other publisher.

### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The literature sources for this study—articles, research papers, research articles, and scientific forum proceedings—are all free from copyright infringement.

### **DISCLAIMER**

The views and assumptions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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