

## The Dynamic of the Religious Education Policy in Indonesia

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### **Abstract:**

Religious education at schools in this country politically always become controversy. This controversy happens until now because there are “ideological battle” between nationalist community and Islamic community who want to establish an Islamic State. Long before Indonesia’s independence, there were three political aspirations about relationship between religion and state in Indonesia. It could be argued that the political dynamic of Indonesia is characterized by competition between those who want to establish an Islamic state and the nation-state, and communist state. There are many historical events which show that the controversy –especially between Islamic-state vs nation-state – actually still happens continually. This fact emphasizes that the aspirations or ideals about Islamic state are still surviving from time to time, generation to generation. Religious education which usually called religion subject is one of “ideological battle” arena. Since the beginning this subject had become a vehicle for realizing Shari’ah Islam inside the nation. During that time the policy of religion subject had developed into three stages. In the first stage subject was voluntary for state schools, and in the second stage subject was mandatory for state schools; and in the last stage is now legally obliged that religion subject should be implemented in all schools according to students’ religion and by the teachers who have the same religion.

**Keywords:** religious education, ideological battle, policy implementation

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

The study of public policy shows that there is a gap between the intentions of the policy itself with what actually occurred in the implementation of the related policy (Lam, 2005; Collins, 2005; O’donoghue & Vidovich, 2004; Morris & Scott, 2003; Morris, 2002; Tilaar, 1995; Jasin, 1987; Dimiyati 1985). This is interrelated to the fact that in one side, a public policy is actually a compromise of various interests behind the policy makers. Meanwhile, in the other side, that policy is always accepted, comprehended from different sides and interests, and implemented (or not implemented) correspondingly to the working capacity of the sides who should implement the policy.

Regarding to the implementation of Curriculum 1984, Tilaar (1995) recorded that this curriculum was designed to improve on Curriculum 1975 by utilizing a research result about Active Students Learning Method (*Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif – CBSA*), but it encountered some burdens in its implementation, such as the restriction of regionals’ ability and the lack of preparation from the teachers, School Supervisors, and the other officials in the curriculum

implementation. In line with that, Leigh (1991) found that the implementation of Curriculum 1984 was different from the *CBSA* characteristics, since it highlighted on three main characteristics which are the opposite of the *CBSA* characteristics. One of them is that the learning process shown an evidence of the activity to ‘**memorize**’ the subject studies from the text book. Whereas, the ability to create new solutions and to prepare policy’s options based on various contradicted factors **were not developed**. Meanwhile, Dimiyati’s study (1985) regarding to the learning process of Social Science subject in all Elementary Schools in Malang (which was an implementation study of Curriculum 1984) shows that the majority of Elementary School teachers, who taught social science, implemented learning method which was not in line with the existed curriculum implementation guidance.

In Hongkong, a study by Morris (2002) about the curriculum reformation after the area authority restoration from England to China, shown that the policy regarding to the Target Oriented Curriculum was also accepted and comprehended differently by the schools and the teachers. Generally, the headmasters

implemented the new curriculum, instead of they wanted to implement the main mission of the new curriculum (which were changing the concept of learning-teaching purpose, the nature of education and the way to assess students' achievement), they considered it as a good means to create one of these things: (a) to legitimate the on-going school reparation program, (b) to increase schools' ability in winning the competition within the other local schools in getting new students, or (c) to increase the schools' income which connected to the sources related to the curriculum renewal (for example the curricular materials or teachers' trainings). The case study conducted by O'donoghue & Vidovich (2004) in a Catholic school in West Australia shows that the curriculum given by the government was not always in line with the aim of the educations from the Church which was given to the Catholic schools. This could trigger a tension between the Churches will and the country's will; and if it was not managed properly, it would be a problem for the schools.

Collins' study (2005) regarding to Catholic senior high schools in New Zealand also found difficulties in meeting the demand from the national curriculum (which was supported by ambitious students' parents, while keep maintaining schools basic mission in accord with the Churches' doctrine). Those kind of schools facing dilemmatic choice, between preparing the students to pass the national examination (therefore they are admitted that they are ready to succeed socially and economically in the society), while carrying out the redemption mission and protecting the cultural values and Catholic. Therefore, there is a tension between: working to the social and educational development of Catholic students, or working to be faithful to the redemption mission and protecting the cultural values and the religion (Catholic).

The above cases justify proposition, that every public policy should consider situational context and should also consider on how the policy is comprehended, interpreted and manipulated by the parties who are actively involved in the present political processes. The cases happening in New Zealand and Australia

show that there is a distinct dynamic experienced by religious schools when they must implement public policies in the form of national curriculum.

Public policies and implementation of policies about religion subject in the national education curriculum in Indonesia also show a distinct dynamic. This article is merely intended to describe the policy dynamic and the implementation of religion subject at school since the Independence Day until the present time. The analysis of public policy can be done by using *policy historiography* and *policy genealogy* approaches (Gale 2001). By using the *historiography* policy, there are some problems to be solved such as (a) What are the public issues which happen in certain policy areas for the last period of time and how do those issues will be stated? (b) How is the condition at the present time? (c) How is the alteration character of those issues from the past up to now? (d) What complexity is included in the policy? and (e) Who will gain the advantage and who will suffer from the loss from the policy arrangement? Meanwhile, by using the *policy genealog*, the problems that will be solved are: (a) How do those policies change from time to time? (b) How could the rationality and consensus be made into problem? and (c) What are the alliances formed on behalf of opposing interests in the process of making those policies?

## 2 RESULT

The dynamics of discourses, regulations and implementations of religious education in Indonesia represent an ideological battle which caused by unsolved problem about the relationship between Islam and the state. Long before Indonesia's independence, the political aspirations on the relationship between religion and state have been split in two. On the one hand there who want the unification of state and religion (Islam) in Islam State of Indonesia such as aspirated by Syarikat Islam, and on the other hand there who want a separation of the state and religion as aspirated by nationalist groups, such as aspirated by Indonesia Nationalist Party, and in some degree by the Indonesian Communist Party (Noer, 2001).

Therefore there are three changes on the First Principle of the Pancasila formulation,

which is rules the relation between state and religion in the Indonesian state: from “Believe in God” (Soekarno version, 1st June 1945), to “Believe in God with the obligation to implementation Islamic sharia for the followers” (Jakarta Charters version, 16th June 1945) and back again to “Believe in God” (PPKI version 18th August 1945). Those facts representing the ideological competition among the founding fathers about how is the ideal of the relationship between state and religion in Indonesia. The fact that the last decision above happens because the Islamic leaders have been “fait-accomplished” by separation aspiration of the people from East Indonesia, therefore it can be understood if there were movements to reviving or reformulating the First Principle of Pancasila, back to the Jakarta Charter version, from time to time in historical journey of Indonesia, as shown by movement of Islamic parties during 1957-1959 Constitutional Assembly sessions; movement of Islamic parties during the National Assembly (MPRS) sessions at the early of the New Era (1966-1968) and the efforts to revive the Jakarta Charter, by a number of parties in the National Assembly (MPR) through the 1945 Constitution amendment process in the early reform period (Subekti, 2008). Those moments show that despite the political power struggle for the unification of state and religion have ups and downs of life, but the aspirations or ideals is survived from time to time, from generation to generation.

The unsolved problem about the relationship between state and religion in Indonesia has a serious implication in the religious education policy. In 1949, when Indonesia National Parliament (BP KNIP) for the first time discussed the Indonesian Education Law, the issue of religious education became a subject of parliamentary debates. Two main issues are the object the struggle are (a) religious education and (b) private schools. The debate about religious education took a lot of time because of the differences in interpretation of the depth of and how religious education is implemented in schools in the Pancasila state. Heated debate occurred when they must decide whether or not compulsory

the religious education in government schools (Tilaar, 1995). In a meeting on October 18, 1949, members of the BP KNIP Zainal Abidin Ahmad delivered what became known as the Memorandum of Aceh. That, among other things: religious education must be a compulsory subject and in terms of mixing of boys and girls (*co-education*) should not be contrary to local customs and religious feelings of Sumatra. This aspiration then countered by Mr. Tambunan which basically reminded of the importance of religious freedom in Indonesia Pancasila society (Tilaar, 1995).

In Law No. 4 of 1950 which was then produced, ultimately determined that: (a) religious instruction is held in state schools, the parents determine whether their children will follow the lesson, (b) the Ministry of Education, Teaching and Culture together with the Minister of Religious Affairs set up how the implementation of religious instruction in public schools (art. 20). Explanation of article 20, determine that (a) whether a particular type of school giving religious instruction is depend on age and intelligence of his students, (b) students who are adults may participate and establish whether or not religious instruction, (c) the nature of learning religion and the number of teaching hours stipulated in the laws of the type of school, (d) religious instruction does not affect the increase in the child class. After Law No. 4/1950 was issued, the government set up a Joint Decree of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education (SKB, January 1951), whose contents include: (a) religious education given from fourth grade of Primary School, (b) In areas of the strong religious communities (eg in Kalimantan, Sumatra, etc.), the religious education given from class first grade of Primary School; (c) In the junior high schools and both of senior high schools upper level (general and vocational) religious education are carried out as much as two hours a week; (d) Religious education is carried out to students at least 10 people in one class and got permission from a parent / guardian; (e) The appointment of teachers of religion, the cost of religious education and religious education materials are borne by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Thus, since the early decades of the 50's until the year 1959, the national education carried out by Ministry of Education based on the spirit of the 1945 Constitution. In practice, religious education is managed entirely by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Curriculum and teaching religious education in state schools performed very loose (class hours are relatively low; the religion subject is not determining student passing grade). While in private schools, its implementation varies depending on the attitude of the organizers.

Even after the declaration of the President Decree on July 5, 1959, religious education is still not a compulsory subject. Students are allowed to not follow religious subjects. For students who do not follow religious subject, are required to follow the character education. In this era the religious education in primary schools was integrated in the character education. In the middle school, religious education carried out with character education. In high school, religious education became part of the philosophy of the Political Manifesto and as a complementary lesson.

**The policy is change while Indonesia enters to a New Order Era.** In the name of spirit to clean-up the followers and sympathizers of the G30S/PKI (Communist Party movement) The National Assembly declare The National Assembly Decisions (TAP MPRS No. XXII / MPRS 1966 on Religion, Education and Culture) that in Article 1 states "*Religious education is a compulsory subject in schools starting from primary school to the state universities*". Thus, since 1966, religion is no longer an optional, but a compulsory subject from primary school to universities across the country. This policy followed by the rules from the Minister of Religious Affairs and the Minister of Education and Culture dated October 23, 1967, which is stated that in the first and second grade of Primary Schools, religious subjects carried out 2 hours per week, at the third grade of Primary Schools 3 hours per week and at the fourth to sixth grade of Primary Schools religious education is carried out 4 hours per week. This formula is also applying to high school, while in college religious education must be carried out 2 hours per week.

At the end of 1970, the Minister of Religious Affairs propose to changes the curriculum of religious instruction. In this case, it is proposed that religious instruction in all elementary and secondary school classes must be held for 6 hours per week. This proposal does not approve by the Ministry of Education and Culture. On the other hand, in the early 1980's, there was a proposal from the public that the government should include comparative religion curriculum for senior high school student. But the proposal has received opposition from the Muslims, saying it could undermine and weaken the faith of the students (Noer, 2001). At the end of the 70s, the Government issued a Ministerial Decree No.. 0211/U/1978, which contains a provision that the month of fasting as a time for students to learn and use the headscarf is ban in schools. The decision led to controversy in the community, because in the past month of fasting is the month-long holiday (Darmaningtyas, 2004). MUI calls for the Department of Education and Culture to review the policy. However, in the forum of meeting with House Commission IX, the Minister of Education and Culture, Daed Joesoef remains adamant that in the month of fasting schools still have to make teaching and learning activities as usual. The cases above show that when it's in between the two government agencies that there were differences in meaning and describe TAP MPRS No. XXII / MPRS 1966 on Religion, Education and Culture. This fact is of course inseparable from the ideological battle between Islamic political groups and nationalist political groups in Indonesia.

In 1989, the government issued the National Education System Law, No. 2 of 1989 which is contains a provision that religious instruction shall also apply to private schools, including private schools with religious character. In addition, it is also new, the Law no. 2 of 1989 also contained provisions concerning the obligation of each student to acquire religious education in accordance with their religion. In the explanation of article 28 of the Act stated '*every student must obtain the appropriate religion and religious instruction by teachers who have the same religion*'.



Responding the objections raised by various parties on this formula, the President then stated assurance that such obligation applies only to public schools. Schools with religious character are not required for other religions, other than the religion that became his trademark. Assurance was then amplified through Government Regulation, No. 29/1990, which explicitly states that schools with certain characteristics of religion are not required to provide religious instruction is different from the religion that characterizes the school.

Such practice was later getting the attention of several parties and the pros and cons as well as triggering massive demonstrations in various parts of the country as a substitute for discussions of the draft of law that will substitute the Law. No 2 of 1989. One issues that the bill is debated in religious instruction in schools. In Law No. 20 of 2003 which was then produced, ultimately determined that: *'every student have a right to have religious education according to students' religion and by the teachers who have the same religion'*.

The recent implementation of this provision is quite different from the New Order Era. Meanwhile President Statement in New Order Era could suspend the implementation of this provision for schools with religious character, now the implementation is more depends on many political actors in local or autonomous region. The schools with religious character administrators face pressures not only from the local bureaucracy but also of radical groups in society. Saptono (1998) noted, how radical groups in society continue to suppress the existence of Christian school. In terms of acceptance of new students, it is common in that there was an idiom of studying at Christian schools is unlawful. It was used to light public to deterring new entrants who would register at Christian schools, by (1) intercept the new entrants will register itself to the Christian schools, (2) comes from house to house new entrants, (3 ) in Islamic religious instruction in public schools before the admission of new students, and (4) in the recitation before the admission of new students. As a result, Christian Schools in some

region have pressures from many local political power and still hope for better policies.

### 3 CONCLUSION

The discussions showed some of the things that we could make into conclusion that, religious subjects at schools in the country, since the beginning had become a vehicle for realizing Islamic sharia inside the nation. Along the process, it was, mandatory for state schools, and it is now legally obliged that religion should be implemented in all schools in accordance with the students religious and by teachers who have the same religion. As a result, Christian Schools in some region have pressures from many local political power and still hope for better policies.

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