RELIGIOUS POLICY AND MULTICULTURAL INCLUSION: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM INDONESIA AND SINGAPORE IN SHAPING EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

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Abstract: This paper examines the management of religious policy and its implications for multicultural education in Indonesia and Singapore. Both nations, though geographically proximate, have developed different approaches in balancing religion, identity, and citizenship within their education systems. Indonesia, with its constitutional commitment to religious education across all recognized faiths, integrates religion into the national curriculum as a compulsory subject, emphasizing both spiritual values and character building. Singapore, by contrast, maintains a secular curriculum where religious education is absent from mainstream schooling, but promotes interfaith understanding through civic education, public initiatives, and institutions such as the Asian Civilisations Museum and the Centre for Interfaith Understanding. Drawing on interviews with interfaith leaders and document analysis of Indonesian religious textbooks and Singaporean educational resources, the study highlights how each country negotiates diversity, social cohesion, and global citizenship. The findings contribute to discussions on inclusive English language education, particularly in relation to the values of innovation, inclusion, and impact within multilingual and multicultural societies.
Keywords: *Religious Policy; Multicultural Inclusion; Comparative Study; Indonesia; Singapore; English Language Education; Transformative Learning*

1. INTRODUCTION

The intersection of religion, education, and multiculturalism has become a critical area of policy and scholarly concern in Southeast Asia. In increasingly diverse societies, schools are not only places of academic learning but also arenas where values of tolerance, respect, and identity are negotiated (Tan & Ibrahim, 2017; Parker, 2018). For Indonesia and Singapore, two neighboring states with distinct historical trajectories, demographic compositions, and constitutional arrangements, the management of religious education represents an essential yet complex challenge.

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, constitutionally recognizes six official religions and mandates religious education for all students from elementary through secondary school (Undang-Undang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, 2003). The curriculum for *Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti* (Religious and Character Education) explicitly aims to nurture students' faith while cultivating moral values aligned with the national ideology of Pancasila (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). In addition, the 2020 Merdeka Belajar reforms and the 2022 integration of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Pancasila Student Profile) place further emphasis on strengthening learners' character, civic identity, and global outlook (Sutarto & Handayani, 2022). These reforms reflect Indonesia's attempt to harmonize religious diversity with national unity in an era of rapid globalization.

In contrast, Singapore adopts a secular approach to education underpinned by its Constitution and state ideology of multiculturalism. Religious instruction is excluded from mainstream public schools, with character and citizenship education (CCE) forming the cornerstone of moral development (Tan, 2021). This approach

stems from Singapore's commitment to racial and religious harmony, safeguarded through institutions such as the Presidential Council for Religious Harmony and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act (Mutalib, 2012). Instead of embedding religion within formal curricula, Singapore integrates intercultural understanding into public education through museums, interfaith initiatives, and community dialogues. The Asian Civilisations Museum, for example, serves as a site of civic pedagogy by showcasing the region's diverse cultural and religious traditions, while organizations such as the Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU) promote dialogue and mutual respect.

Comparative scholarship on religious education in these two nations remains limited. Most studies focus on either the challenges of Islamic education reform in Indonesia (Azra, 2014; Hefner, 2019) or the management of multiculturalism in Singapore (Chua, 2015; Gopinathan, 2018). Few works juxtapose both cases to reveal how differing policy frameworks and educational practices reflect broader conceptions of citizenship, identity, and diversity. By bridging this gap, the present study investigates how religious policy is operationalized within educational contexts in Indonesia and Singapore, and what implications this has for character formation, interfaith harmony, and inclusive English language education.

This study draws on multiple sources of data: (1) document analysis of Indonesian religious education textbooks and national curriculum policies; (2) analysis of materials from the Asian Civilisations Museum and libraries in Singapore; and (3) qualitative interviews with two interfaith leaders, one from the Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU) in Singapore and another from the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). Together, these sources provide insights into how states and civil society actors negotiate the intersection of religion and education.

By examining these cases, the study makes two main contributions. First, it enriches comparative education scholarship by analyzing two distinct models: Indonesia's religiously integrated curriculum and Singapore's secular yet multicultural framework. Second, it connects these findings to broader discussions in English language education, where values of inclusion, innovation, and impact are increasingly emphasized in response to global challenges (Hall, 2020). Ultimately, the paper argues that while Indonesia foregrounds religious identity within formal education and Singapore emphasizes civic inclusivity through secular means, both approaches seek to prepare students as ethical, responsible, and globally minded citizens.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of religion, education, and multicultural inclusion has been a central focus in comparative educational research, particularly in diverse societies such as Indonesia and Singapore. These countries present distinct models of how religious and multicultural values are negotiated within formal schooling and broader educational policies. This literature review synthesizes key studies on religious education, citizenship formation, and multicultural inclusion, drawing from scholarly works, policy documents, and international frameworks to situate the present research.

2.1. Religion and Education in Indonesia

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, enshrines religious plurality through Pancasila, the state ideology that emphasizes belief in one Supreme God alongside principles of social justice, unity, and democracy (Magnis-Suseno, 2019). Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution mandates education for all citizens, while Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System requires religious education to be taught at every level of schooling, from primary to higher education, according to each student's religion (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003).

Scholars argue that this model positions religion as a foundational element of Indonesian education, aiming to instill moral and spiritual values in students (Parker & Raihani, 2011). Baidhawy (2013) highlights that religious instruction is often framed as a moral safeguard against social fragmentation, but critics argue that it risks reinforcing exclusivist interpretations of faith (Jackson, 2019). Mujiburrahman (2020) observes that teachers frequently prioritize doctrinal teachings, leaving limited space for interfaith dialogue.

The introduction of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* under the Merdeka Belajar curriculum reform represents a significant policy shift. This framework articulates six competencies—faith and piety, global diversity, independence, cooperation, critical reasoning, and creativity (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). Scholars note that it aligns with UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education (GCED) principles (UNESCO, 2015), particularly in promoting inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding (Davids & Waghid, 2021). Recent studies show that textbooks for subjects such as English language learning increasingly embed civic and moral values, illustrating how religious and character education extend beyond religion classes into broader curricular spaces (Setyowati & Kusumaningrum, 2022).

Despite these developments, challenges persist. Raihani (2018) points out that while curriculum policy promotes diversity, classroom implementation often mirrors local socio-religious dynamics, which can perpetuate sectarian boundaries. This tension illustrates the ongoing negotiation between state-led inclusivity agendas and community-driven religious practices.

2.2. Religion and Education in Singapore

Singapore presents a contrasting approach, where religion is intentionally excluded from formal school curricula to preserve secularism and ensure harmony among its multi-religious population (Tan, 2014). The state manages diversity primarily through secular civic education, emphasizing values that transcend specific faith traditions (Chua, 2017).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) developed the *21st Century Competencies* (21CC) framework to cultivate civic literacy, global awareness, and cross-cultural skills (MOE, 2019). Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) is the central platform for moral formation, incorporating lessons on respect, resilience, empathy, and national identity (Sim, 2017). Research suggests that CCE fosters shared values without privileging any single religious worldview (Tan & Gopinathan, 2000).

Importantly, religious tolerance in Singapore is reinforced through community-based institutions. Organizations such as the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) and the Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU) complement formal schooling by promoting interfaith dialogue and public education on religious harmony (Mutalib,

2012). This external support framework contrasts with Indonesia's state-mandated religious curriculum by situating interfaith engagement outside the classroom.

Scholars note the strengths and limitations of this model. Tan (2018) argues that Singapore's secular approach effectively minimizes religious conflict in schools, while Parker (2016) suggests that it may leave students without sufficient exposure to religious diversity as lived experiences. Nonetheless, Singapore's strategy is widely recognized as effective in maintaining peace in a heterogeneous society (Noor, 2020).

2.3. Comparative Perspectives on Multicultural Inclusion

Comparative education scholarship highlights the divergent yet complementary strategies of Indonesia and Singapore in addressing multicultural inclusion. Indonesia integrates religious identity explicitly into the school system, whereas Singapore prioritizes secular civic values. Both aim to cultivate moral and civic-minded citizens, but through different epistemological and policy frameworks (Tan & Ibrahim, 2017).

Indonesia's model has been praised for nurturing strong religious identity and moral orientation but criticized for its potential to reproduce sectarian divides (Parker & Raihani, 2011; Mujiburrahman, 2020). Singapore's approach, meanwhile, is lauded for fostering social cohesion but critiqued for potentially neglecting deeper moral and spiritual questions (Tan, 2018). Comparative insights suggest that both systems are shaped by broader socio-political contexts: Indonesia's state ideology of Pancasila versus Singapore's multicultural nation-building project (Lee, 2018).

Internationally, both approaches resonate with debates on citizenship education. Osler and Starkey (2018) emphasize the need for "cosmopolitan citizenship" in plural societies, which requires balancing local identities with global responsibilities. Indonesia leans toward embedding cosmopolitan values within religious frameworks, while Singapore operationalizes them through secular civic education.

2.4. Educational Transformation in the Global Era

Globalization exerts significant influence on educational policies in both countries. UNESCO's GCED agenda emphasizes tolerance, empathy, and intercultural understanding, framing education as a tool for peacebuilding (UNESCO, 2015). Both Indonesia and Singapore have aligned elements of their curricula with GCED, though through distinct pathways.

In Indonesia, *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* represents an attempt to globalize civic values while retaining religious grounding (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). In Singapore, the CCE curriculum reflects global concerns such as sustainability, digital citizenship, and cultural literacy, positioning education as a vehicle for preparing students for global competitiveness (MOE, 2019).

Scholars argue that these transformations reflect broader educational shifts in Asia, where moral and civic education are increasingly integrated with global competencies (Davids & Waghid, 2021). Yet, the challenge remains how to reconcile local religious traditions with international norms of inclusivity and human rights (Tan, 2020).

2.5. Policy Evolution and Critiques

The evolution of policy frameworks in both nations reveals the complexities of managing religion in education. In Indonesia, debates continue over whether compulsory religious education fosters inclusivity or reinforces divisions (Baidhawy, 2013). Studies show that while curricula encourage tolerance, actual implementation often reflects majoritarian perspectives (Raihani, 2018).

In Singapore, secularism is often praised as a safeguard of social harmony, but some scholars argue it marginalizes religious discourse in public education (Tan, 2014; Chua, 2017). This raises questions about whether moral education can remain robust without engaging religious worldviews directly.

Critiques from international scholars further enrich the debate. Jackson (2019) emphasizes that religious education should cultivate interpretive skills to engage with diversity, not merely transmit doctrines. This perspective resonates with calls for dialogical rather than doctrinal approaches in Indonesia and for more open engagement with religion in Singapore.

The reviewed literature underscores the centrality of education in negotiating religion and multiculturalism in Indonesia and Singapore. Indonesia exemplifies a faith-based integration model, embedding religion throughout curricula to promote moral and civic identity. Singapore advances a secular civic framework that emphasizes multicultural cohesion and shared national values. Both systems align with global citizenship frameworks, albeit through different pedagogical and policy logics.

The literature also highlights ongoing challenges: Indonesia's risk of sectarian exclusivity and Singapore's potential neglect of deeper moral discourses. Comparative perspectives suggest that both nations offer valuable insights into balancing religion, identity, and global citizenship in plural societies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative comparative case study design to analyze how Indonesia and Singapore manage religious policy and multicultural inclusion in education. Comparative education research is particularly effective for understanding the ways in which different societies negotiate religion, identity, and citizenship through schooling and related cultural institutions (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2014). The approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of both formal curricular policies and informal practices that shape educational experiences.

3.1. Research Design

A **descriptive qualitative design was used**, focusing on document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and field-based observations in educational and cultural settings. The design was grounded in the recognition that religion and education are socially constructed domains embedded within political, historical, and cultural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The comparative dimension was central, enabling the study to highlight similarities and differences across Indonesia and Singapore while situating them within broader discourses of citizenship and multicultural education.

3.2. Data Sources

The study relied on multiple data sources to ensure triangulation and richness of analysis. These sources included:

a. **Policy and Curriculum Documents**
   1) In Indonesia: national curriculum frameworks (*Kurikulum 2013* and *Merdeka Belajar*), official syllabi, and religious education textbooks (*Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti*) across elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary levels.
   2) In Singapore: policy documents from the Ministry of Education (MOE), including the *Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)* curriculum guides, and the *21st Century Competencies* (21CC) framework.

b. **English Language Textbooks**
   In Indonesia, English textbooks were analyzed to identify moral and civic narratives embedded in texts, with a particular focus on how *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* competencies are integrated.

c. **Cultural and Educational Institutions**
   1) **Asian Civilisations Museum (Singapore):** Exhibitions on religion and culture were analyzed for how they frame interfaith harmony and multicultural inclusion.
   2) **Public Libraries (Singapore):** Books and curated collections on religious harmony were examined as part of informal education efforts.

d. **Interviews**
   Two key informant interviews were conducted:
   1) One with a founder of the *Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU)* in Singapore, an organization established in 2019 to promote interfaith dialogue and inclusive approaches to harmony across Southeast Asia.
   2) One with a representative affiliated with the *King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID)*, which bridges religious leaders and policymakers to advocate for peace and counter violent extremism.

   These interviews provided critical insights into how interfaith education and dialogue are integrated into broader national and international educational frameworks.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

a. **Document Collection**
   Indonesian textbooks (Grades 1–12) were obtained from the Ministry of Education's open-access digital library and physical copies where available. Singapore policy documents were accessed from MOE's official website, while museum and library resources were collected during site visits.

b. **Interviews**
   Semi-structured interviews were conducted in English, each lasting 150 minutes. They were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis.

c. **Field Notes**
   Observations from museum visits and library exploration in Singapore were recorded to capture how religion and multicultural narratives were presented in non-formal settings.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through **thematic coding** (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in three stages:

a. **Initial Coding:** Policy documents, textbooks, and interview transcripts were coded for recurring themes such as "religious doctrine," "interfaith dialogue," "civic identity," and "multicultural harmony."
b. **Axial Coding:** Codes were grouped into broader categories reflecting (a) policy frameworks, (b) representation in educational and cultural practices, and (c) implications for English language education.
c. **Comparative Analysis:** Findings from Indonesia and Singapore were systematically compared, emphasizing contrasts between doctrinal religious education (Indonesia) and secular civic education (Singapore).

NVivo software supported the coding and organization of qualitative data. Triangulation was ensured by cross-referencing document analysis with interview insights and observational data.

3.5. Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

To enhance **credibility**, multiple sources (textbooks, interviews, cultural institutions) were triangulated. **Member checking** was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with interviewees to validate interpretations. **Transferability** was strengthened through thick description of contexts, while **dependability** and **confirmability** were addressed by maintaining detailed audit trails of coding decisions and data collection processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical approval was obtained from the affiliated university's ethics review board. Informed consent was secured from interview participants, and pseudonyms are used in reporting to maintain confidentiality.

3.6. Limitations

The study faced several limitations. In Indonesia, the analysis was restricted to publicly available textbooks and may not fully capture variations across regions. In Singapore, interviews were limited to two experts, which, while insightful, cannot represent the full spectrum of perspectives. Nonetheless, the integration of diverse data sources helps mitigate these limitations and provides a comprehensive comparative account.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings from both Indonesia and Singapore and discusses their implications for religious education, multicultural inclusion, and English language education. The discussion is organized into three themes: (a) policy frameworks, (b) representation in educational practices and cultural institutions, (c) implications for transformative and inclusive learning, and (d) strengths and challenges.

4.1. Policy Frameworks: Negotiating Religion and National Identity

In Indonesia, the state recognizes six official religions and mandates religious education as a compulsory subject in schools (*Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti*).

This reflects the constitutional principle of *Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa* while maintaining a commitment to pluralism under *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Textbook analysis revealed that religious content is strongly normative, emphasizing moral values, piety, and interfaith tolerance. However, the representation of minority religions is often limited, with Islam, as the majority religion, receiving more comprehensive coverage (Field notes, 2025).

In Singapore, by contrast, religion is approached primarily through the lens of secular governance and multicultural harmony. Policy documents and interviews highlighted that the government does not allow formal religious instruction in public schools. Instead, religious diversity is addressed indirectly through **Civics and Moral Education** and the broader **Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)** framework. An interviewed expert from the Centre for Interfaith Understanding (CIFU) emphasized that Singapore's approach is deliberately inclusive and progressive:

> "We cannot teach religion directly in classrooms, but we are expected to teach respect for all beliefs. The focus is always on harmony and citizenship rather than doctrine" (CIFU founder, Interview, 4 September 2025).

This reveals a fundamental difference: Indonesia frames religious education as doctrinal and faith-based, while Singapore frames it as civic and harmony-oriented. Both approaches reflect the states' overarching nation-building projects.

4.2. Representation in Educational and Cultural Practices

a. Indonesia: Textbooks and Religious Narratives

The analysis of Indonesian textbooks showed recurring themes of moral behavior, interfaith respect, and civic responsibility. Yet, representation remains uneven. For example, in several textbooks, Islamic practices (prayers, rituals, holidays) are elaborated in detail, while minority faiths receive shorter explanations. This creates an asymmetry that, while not overtly discriminatory, risks reinforcing the dominance of majority narratives. Such findings resonate with previous critiques that religious education in Indonesia may reproduce majoritarian perspectives (Parker, 2014).

b. Singapore: Classroom, Museum, and Public Narratives

In Singapore, interviews and cultural sources reveal a more neutral but highly regulated narrative of religion. The Asian Civilisations Museum plays a central role in educating the public about the cultural heritage of different religions, presenting artifacts and histories side by side to emphasize coexistence (Museum field notes, 2025).

The policymaker interviewed highlighted that museums and community programs are deliberately integrated into the broader education ecosystem:

> "We use museums, exhibitions, and libraries to complement what students learn in school. They don't learn religion as faith, but they see religion as culture and heritage" (CIFU founder, Interview, 4 September 2025).

The KAICIID representative further stressed that intercultural and interreligious dialogue in education should not only prevent extremism but also cultivate global peace-building skills:

> "Education must go beyond tolerance—it should empower students to become active agents of peace and intercultural

understanding" (KAICIID representative, Interview, 4 September 2025).

Thus, while Indonesia relies on school-based doctrinal instruction, Singapore mobilizes non-formal institutions such as museums and libraries, complemented by interfaith organizations, to cultivate awareness of religious diversity.

4.3. Implications for Inclusion and English Language Education

Both models have implications for English language education in the context of inclusion and globalization. In Indonesia, textbooks analyzed for English language subjects often intersect with moral education by including texts that emphasize respect, tolerance, and religious values. However, these are still shaped by dominant religious perspectives. The challenge lies in integrating authentic multicultural perspectives into English teaching materials, which could enrich intercultural competence for learners preparing for a globalized context.

In Singapore, English serves as the lingua franca and is the primary medium of instruction across subjects, including CCE. Because religion is framed as part of cultural and civic education, English is also the language through which values of harmony and multiculturalism are mediated. Museum and library resources further reinforce these narratives in English, positioning the language as a bridge for intercultural dialogue (Museum field notes, 2025).

This comparison reveals that **Indonesia embeds religious plurality within doctrinal frameworks,** while **Singapore embeds it within secular civic education and cultural representation, supported by interfaith organizations such as CIFU and KAICIID**. Both systems aim at fostering tolerance, but their approaches differ: one through faith-based instruction, the other through secular multicultural narratives.

4.4. Strengths and Challenges

The Indonesian model ensures that students receive explicit religious knowledge and grounding, which strengthens identity but risks privileging the majority religion. The challenge is how to incorporate more balanced representations and how English language education can serve as a platform for intercultural communication rather than doctrinal reinforcement.

The Singaporean model avoids sectarian dominance by adopting a secular civic lens, but this may dilute students' deep understanding of religious doctrines. Instead, religion is engaged with as heritage and culture. While this model strengthens social cohesion, it may lack depth in terms of doctrinal literacy.

To illustrate these contrasts more clearly, Table 1 presents a comparison of how character and citizenship formation is represented in both systems:

Table 1. Comparative Representation of Character and Citizenship Formation in Indonesia and Singapore

Dimension	Indonesia (SD–SMA)	Singapore (Primary–Secondary)
Policy Framework	Religious education compulsory (*Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti*). Profil Pelajar Pancasila as curriculum anchor.	No religious instruction in schools. CCE (Character and Citizenship Education) as framework.
Character Values	Faith, piety, collaboration, critical thinking, global diversity (Profil Pelajar Pancasila).	Empathy, respect, responsibility, harmony, multicultural awareness (CCE).
English Textbooks	Examples from *When English Rings a Bell* (SMP): texts on friendship, respecting parents, and tolerance. *Pathway to English* (SMA): passages on teamwork and social care. Values often framed with majority religion context.	English as medium of all subjects. CCE narratives integrated into English activities (role-play, reflective writing). Museums and libraries provide additional cultural resources.
Approach to Religion	Religion is taught as doctrine and practice, often with emphasis on Islam (majority). Minority faiths less represented.	Religion framed as culture/heritage, not doctrine. Taught indirectly through civics and cultural education.
Character Formation Mechanism	School-based doctrinal instruction, teacher-led religious and moral education.	Secular civic education, reinforced by museums, libraries, and community engagement programs.

Comparatively, both approaches demonstrate that managing religion in education is not simply a pedagogical question but a reflection of broader political and societal projects. For the field of English language education, this highlights the need for transformative pedagogies that not only teach linguistic skills but also foster intercultural and interfaith dialogue in ways that are sensitive to national contexts.

Table 2. Sub Findings by School Levels

School Level / Education Stage	Indonesia – Religious Moderation Education	Singapore – Character and Citizenship Education (CCE)
Elementary / Primary	Religious values introduced through *Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti*; emphasis on basic tolerance, moral behavior, and daily rituals (e.g., prayer, respect for parents, interfaith respect at a simple level).	CCE emphasizes respect, responsibility, and social harmony through moral stories, classroom discussions, and co-curricular activities. Religion is addressed as cultural diversity, not doctrine.
Junior High / Secondary	Curriculum expands into interfaith dialogue, diversity projects, and moral dilemmas; focus on preventing exclusivism and introducing moderation narratives. Textbooks begin	Greater emphasis on leadership, civic responsibility, and intercultural understanding. Students engage in community service and discussions on multiculturalism, using English as the medium of reflection.

	addressing social cohesion issues.	
Senior High / Junior College	Students critically engage with contemporary issues such as radicalism, human rights, gender, and global interfaith relations. Religious moderation framed as essential for democratic citizenship.	CCE focuses on critical reflection, global citizenship, and resilience. Religion is framed as cultural heritage and part of civic identity, reinforced through museums, libraries, and national narratives.

At the primary level, Indonesia introduces religious moderation through simple approaches such as storytelling, civic rituals, and lessons on tolerance based on local wisdom. The focus is on shaping early awareness of unity and preventing exclusivism. Similarly, Singapore's primary schools emphasize foundational values like respect, care, and responsibility through Character and Citizenship Education (CCE). These values are reinforced in daily practices such as group activities, sharing circles, and exposure to national identity messages. Both systems seek to lay a moral foundation, though Indonesia stresses tolerance across religions, while Singapore highlights civic virtues and belonging.

At the lower secondary level, Indonesian schools begin to engage students in more critical discussions on interfaith harmony. Activities such as scouting, student councils, and digital literacy programs reinforce tolerance and guard against online intolerance. In contrast, Singaporean secondary schools focus on developing moral reasoning and resilience through service-learning and projects addressing social issues. Cyber wellness and mental health education also become central. Both contexts emphasize character in adolescence, but Indonesia prioritizes preventing religious-based conflict, whereas Singapore emphasizes social responsibility and psychological well-being.

At the upper secondary level, Indonesian students explore more complex themes such as radicalism, identity politics, and interfaith dialogue. Schools encourage them to take leadership roles in promoting tolerance through forums and campaigns. Meanwhile, Singapore's Junior Colleges (JC) direct students toward global citizenship and nation-building through advanced ethical discussions, leadership camps, and exposure to social dilemmas. Both countries prepare young adults for citizenship roles, but Indonesia stresses peaceful coexistence in diversity, while Singapore emphasizes leadership and global responsibility.

The comparative framework (Table 1) and level-specific findings (Table 2) reveal not only complementarities but also strengths and weaknesses in both systems.

In the case of Indonesia, the strength lies in its explicit integration of religious moderation into the curriculum. From primary school onward, students are taught values of tolerance, respect for diversity, and interfaith understanding, which align strongly with the nation's ideological foundation of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Azra, 2006; Zuhdi, 2018). This grounding provides resilience against exclusivism and radical ideologies, particularly at the secondary and upper-secondary levels, where discussions on extremism and identity politics are more explicit (Azzumardi & Howell, 2017). However, a notable weakness is that the framework often relies heavily on textual religious instruction, which can risk becoming normative and prescriptive (Parker, 2014). The compartmentalization of religious education into specific subjects may also limit its integration across other areas of learning,

potentially reducing its relevance for students who may perceive it as abstract or disconnected from everyday realities.

By contrast, Singapore's character education model demonstrates a strength in its holistic and integrated approach. Values such as respect, resilience, and responsibility are embedded across subjects and reinforced through co-curricular activities, service-learning, and leadership programs (Tan & Chew, 2004; Sim & Print, 2009). This allows for a lived experience of values, rather than a solely cognitive one. The focus on psychological well-being and cyber wellness at the secondary level also highlights responsiveness to contemporary challenges (Singapore Ministry of Education, 2021). A potential weakness, however, is that the absence of explicit religious discourse may limit the opportunity for students to critically engage with faith-based differences. While secular civic values encourage inclusivity, they may overlook the deeper cultural or religious dimensions that are important to identity formation in a multicultural society (Kuah-Pearce, 2009; Chua, 2015).

Looking at Table 2, a key strength of Indonesia's model is the progressive deepening of interfaith engagement from storytelling in primary school to critical dialogue in upper secondary. This scaffolding directly addresses issues of religious tension in society (Mujiburrahman, 2011). Yet, the challenge lies in implementation, as not all teachers are equally trained to facilitate sensitive discussions on radicalism or pluralism, risking either superficial delivery or avoidance of difficult topics (Raihani, 2014). In Singapore, the strength is its consistency in nurturing students' civic responsibility and global outlook (Koh, 2014; Kennedy, 2019). However, the high performance-driven context of Singapore's education system may sometimes push character education to the periphery, with academic achievement overshadowing values-based outcomes (Tan, 2012).

In short, both systems reflect their socio-political priorities in which Indonesia focuses on safeguarding pluralism in a context of religious diversity, while Singapore emphasizes civic harmony and global competitiveness in a secular framework. The lesson from this comparison is that religious policy and multicultural inclusion require balance: Indonesia could benefit from more integrative, experiential methods like Singapore, while Singapore could gain from creating spaces for deeper interfaith dialogue, similar to Indonesia. Together, these models highlight that education for character and citizenship must be both context-sensitive and forward-looking (Banks, 2008; Lickona, 1996; UNESCO, 2015). Overall, the findings underscore the complexity of balancing faith, identity, and inclusion in diverse societies. Both Indonesia and Singapore offer lessons for how religious diversity can be addressed in education: one through explicit instruction, the other through secular civic frameworks and cultural institutions. The comparative insights provide fertile ground for rethinking English language education as a transformative space where innovation, inclusion, and impact converge.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This qualitative comparative study of Indonesia and Singapore reveals two distinct but equally purposeful approaches to managing religion within education. Indonesia embeds religious education directly into the school curriculum through *Pendidikan Agama dan Budi Pekerti*, supported by the Profil Pelajar Pancasila framework. This model strengthens faith identity and moral values, but risks

privileging majority perspectives, particularly in textbook narratives. Meanwhile, Singapore adopts a secular civic approach, positioning religion as culture and heritage within the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum, supported by museums and libraries. This avoids sectarian dominance and promotes multicultural harmony, but may not provide students with deeper doctrinal literacy.

Both systems reflect broader nation-building projects: Indonesia's faith-based pluralism and Singapore's secular multiculturalism. Importantly, English language education emerges in both contexts as a critical medium for shaping intercultural competence, tolerance, and global citizenship. Yet, challenges remain in ensuring balanced representation, integrating authentic multicultural perspectives, and fostering transformative dialogue.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

a. For Indonesia

1) Broaden representation of minority religions in textbooks to reduce asymmetry.
2) Integrate Profil Pelajar Pancasila values more explicitly into English language materials, especially on themes of global citizenship, empathy, and collaboration.
3) Encourage cross-disciplinary learning, where English is used to explore intercultural and interfaith themes beyond doctrinal content.

b. For Singapore

1) Strengthen connections between CCE and English classrooms by incorporating reflective writing, debates, and literature that highlight diverse faith perspectives.
2) Continue leveraging museums, libraries, and community spaces as informal education platforms, but ensure teachers are trained to bridge these experiences back into classroom learning.
3) Consider optional modules for students interested in learning more deeply about world religions, framed from a comparative cultural perspective rather than doctrinal instruction.

c. For English Language Education Globally

1) Position English classrooms as transformative spaces for intercultural and interfaith dialogue.
2) Use authentic multicultural texts and projects to promote empathy, critical thinking, and global awareness.
3) Balance innovation (digital and multimodal tools) with inclusion (representation of diverse voices) to ensure meaningful educational impact.

In sum, the comparative insights from Indonesia and Singapore demonstrate that religious diversity in education can be addressed through both doctrinal and secular civic frameworks. English language education holds significant potential to bridge these approaches, offering a transformative platform for innovation, inclusion, and impact in diverse societies.

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