

Interreligious Education Model at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta in Response to Indonesia's Compulsory Religious Education Policy

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Abstract

Research on compulsory religious education policies in Indonesia tends to be normative, less pedagogical and focuses on mono-religious teaching. Consequently, Indonesia's existing religious education model falls short of fostering tolerance and mutual respect among students of diverse faiths, particularly within the school setting. The mono-religious approach not only presents pedagogical challenges but also hinders the development of dialogue between teachers and students of differing beliefs. This paper attempts to narrate teachers' experiences in teaching religious education to students of various religions, utilizing qualitative methods such as literature review and interviews. The study focuses on Christian religion teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta. The findings reveal that teachers face challenges in bridging knowledge gaps between themselves and students, prompting the need for negotiation and transformation of the religious education classroom into an interreligious education space, fostering dialogue between teachers and students of different faiths.

Key Words: Interreligious education, interreligious dialogue, religious education

Abstrak

Penelitian ini terkait kebijakan Pendidikan Agama yang wajib di Indonesia, tetapi cenderung normative dan tidak memiliki aspek pedagogis serta fokus pengajaran yang bersifat mono-religius. Model pendidikan agama di Indonesia tidak cukup untuk menopang toleransi dan sikap saling menghormati antar umat beragama. Dalam penerapannya Pendidikan agama model mon-religius tidak hanya menciptakan tantangan pedagogis melainkan juga tantangan dalam pengembangan dialog antar guru dan murid yang berbeda keyakinan. Dialog antara guru dan murid yang berbeda agama, sejauh amatan penulis, belum mendapat tempat dalam penelitian kebijakan pendidikan agama di Indonesia. Berangkat dari persoalan tersebut, tulisan ini bertujuan menarasikan pengalaman guru-guru dalam mengajarkan pendidikan agama pada murid yang berbeda agama. Penelitian ini akan menggunakan metode kualitatif yakni studi literatur dan wawancara. Subjek-subjek yang akan menjadi narasumber adalah para guru agama kristen di SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta, tempat penulis bekerja dulu. Secara sistematis, tulisan ini adalah sebuah upaya untuk mendeskripsikan dan menganalisa pengalaman dan strategi para guru untuk mengajarkan pelajaran Agama Kristen kepada murid-murid dari latar belakang agama lain. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa, dalam penerapannya, para guru mengalami berbagai tantangan untuk mengajarkan pendidikan agama kepada para murid karena adanya kesenjangan pengetahuan dari kedua pihak. Sebagai solusi,

para guru membangun negosiasi materi pembelajaran dan mentransformasi ruang kelas Pendidikan agama menjadi pendidikan interreligius. Pendidikan interreligious menjadi ruang dialog antar agama bagi guru dan murid yang berbeda agama.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Interreligius, Dialog Antar-agama, Pendidikan Agama

Introduction

This writing reflects on my personal experiences (Jear) while working as a religious education teacher at the Christian Senior High School of BPK PENABUR Jakarta (further SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta). In my role, I was responsible for teaching Christian Religious Education as a mandatory course. Teaching PAK was relatively easy for me as I had a background in Christian religious education. The main challenge in my job came from the students. In the classroom, I encountered students from a Christian background and those from other religions, mainly Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, and Confucianism, which I rarely encountered. I still remember the names of non-Christian students to this day. I also included their struggles to understand the unfamiliar teachings of Christianity, as it was something they had never believed in or studied before.

The struggle to teach Christianity to non-Christian students is a responsibility shared by all Christian religious education teachers in schools. However, for me, the ones who bear the most significant burden are the students. Most non-Christian students often show reluctance to learn Christian Religious Education, manifested through habits like dozing off in class or neglecting homework. One might label them lazy at a glance, but I find the term irrelevant in their context. I understand that non-Christian students feel uncomfortable learning a subject that is not part of their 'beliefs.' In my view, their attitude can be justified because, on a broader scale, the blame should be placed on schools that refuse to hire teachers of religions other than Christianity. It means the students cannot be held accountable; they are victims of a 'school system.'

Furthermore, I recently learned that religious education is mandatory in Indonesia, as stipulated by the National Education System Law No. 37 of 2003. This law clearly states that all schools must offer religious education as a compulsory subject. Therefore, in my view, the core issue arises from a broader system—the policy of compulsory religious education in Indonesia. Since it is mandated as a compulsory subject, all students must take religious education, regardless of their personal beliefs. The problem arises when students are compelled to study a religion other than their own due to a shortage of teachers. While one might quickly suggest that schools should be responsible for providing teachers based on students' beliefs, the reality is more complex than that.

SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta has the right not to provide religious teachers. This right is established through Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007, which mandates that non-formal schools must offer religious education. However, its management is regulated according to the specific religious characteristics of the educational institution. In the context of school autonomy, every religious general school has the right to offer only religious education that aligns with its distinctive features. As that school primarily focuses on Christian education, it did not provide Islamic religious education. Consequently, the fate of not receiving religious education through a teacher of the same faith is a consequence of students' decisions before enrolling in the school. Non-Christian students knew this consequence and still attended SMAK BPK PENABUR for a better education. In other words, the school cannot be entirely blamed for this matter.

Is there a solution to the dilemma of the "limitations of religious education services for non-Christian students at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta in the classroom?" What strategies do Christian Religious Education teachers employ to teach Christian doctrines to students from non-Christian backgrounds? These two questions are the key focus of this article. Through this concept, we argue that teachers creatively develop instructional materials from the perspective of other religions, a process we term "Interreligious Education." Teachers transform the Religious Education class into an Interreligious Education class by employing various models and the use of universal language. Consequently, normative constraints (laws) and mono-religious education models do not hinder teachers from conducting multi-religious education. Teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta ultimately play a role as educators and actors in interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue activities in the classroom can, at a certain point, serve as a tool of critique against normative and discriminatory religious obligation laws. This argument will be further detailed in the subsequent sections.

Method

This research is an in-depth interview method with 20 Christian Religious Education teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta. This method is used to explore in depth each experience, attitude and view of respondents who are teachers in their fields. 20 respondents are needed for the complexity of the data analysis needed. In addition, this research also uses a literature review to build strong arguments based on data obtained from various literature sources. The interview results are analyzed using the agency concept proposed by Nancy Ammerman (Ammerman, 2014; Nancy Tatom Ammerman, 2021). The literature review method helps in tracing and analyzing various publications related to religious education laws and the

obligation of religious education in Indonesia. The interview method helps in collecting and analyzing data regarding the implementation of religious education at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta. Furthermore, we analyze the data through the agency concept proposed by Nancy Ammerman. The results of this analysis are used to criticize the mono-religious education model practiced in Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

Compulsory Religious Education in Indonesia and Its Limitations

Various studies indicate that religious education in Indonesia has been a significant focus in the discourse of the nation's founders since the early days of Indonesian independence. Religious education has been a mandatory subject in Indonesia since 1956. The discourse on religious education serves as the basis and foundation for Pancasila education that is devoted to the belief in the One Almighty God (Kelabora, 1983b, pp. 54–55). The reinforcement of religion in education is then referred to as *Pancawardhana*. Moreover, the *Pancawardhana* system went further to refine and extend this educational ideology to encompass the development of the love of nation and homeland, religious and international morality, the intellect, artistic emotions, handicrafts, and manual work, as well as physical training (Kelabora, 1983a, p. 45). Teachers in every school are then obliged to align religious instruction with the spirit of Pancasila contained within *Pancawardhana*.

After the fall of the Soeharto regime in 1998, Indonesia entered the era of Democracy. The curriculum was subsequently revised to be more democratic, incorporating the role of teachers in each school to formulate curriculum designs (Sihono, 2017, pp. 1–2). Despite the democratic era, where the people have an equal standing with the government in shaping the direction of the state, the central government still controls the education system. This control over education is known as the decentralization of national education (Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006, p. 513). Decentralization of education is carried out for at least two purposes. First, to ensure that the curriculum can be implemented uniformly and simultaneously throughout Indonesia. Second, to ensure that the educational curriculum adequately addresses social, economic, and political issues, and the challenges of globalization in Indonesia (Kuhon, 2020, p. 14). Dynamically, the transformation of the national education system in Indonesia, spanning from the old order to the new order to the democratic era, continues to evolve. Interestingly, in the democratic era, we believe Indonesian education embraces the ideals of the old and new orders. The decentralization of education in Indonesia during the democratic era ensures that education in Indonesia educates citizens to build the nation in the spirit of

Pancasila collectively. Pancasila and Democracy are two crucial keywords in the establishment of compulsory religious education policy under the National Education System Law No. 37 of 2003 (Elihami, 2016; Hariani et al., 2022, p. 12).

In his doctoral dissertation titled 'Religious Education in Indonesia: An Empirical Study of Religious Education Models in Islamic, Christian, and Hindu Affiliated Schools,' Mohamad Yusuf provides a comprehensive examination of the implications of compulsory religious education in Indonesia. In his dissertation, Yusuf gives significant attention to compulsory religious education, considering it crucial for understanding the State's preference for a specific type of religious education. The enactment of Law No. 20/2003 has faced public criticism, particularly concerning incorporating religious values into the national education system and the State's intervention in practicing religious education in private schools (Yusuf, 2016, p. 1). Confidently, Yusuf argues that the law is a product of 'state politics.' Law No. 20/2003 indicates the Indonesian government's tendency to choose a mono-religious model as the pattern for religious education in Indonesia (Yusuf, 2016, p. 55). As a consequence, students in Indonesia are restricted to learning religious education based on their respective beliefs. Consequently, religious education is no longer a free choice but an obligation for students to instill their religious beliefs in citizens (Chandra, 2023; Hariani et al., 2022; Nasuhi, 2022).

In another publication, Mohamad Yusuf highlights two main weaknesses of the state's version of religious education. First, the practice of the mono-religious model contradicts the fact that Indonesia is a religiously pluralistic country. Second, concerning the recognition of religious plurality, the mono-religious model does not provide students with the opportunity to learn about different religions and from other religious believers (Yusuf, 2020, p. 50). In line with Yusuf, Zainal Abidin Bagir and Irwan Abdullah indicate that this compulsory education model has significant impacts on 'religious literacy and interreligious dialogue.' The subjects taught in the course aim to internalize one's religion. The implementation in schools involves students being separated into different classrooms based on their religion to receive instructions about their own religion. (Abidin Bagir, 2008, p. 3). The mono-religious model results in students becoming religious but lacking knowledge about other religions. This limitation closes the space for interreligious dialogue as adherents are not taught to study and respect each other. The consequence of mono-religious education creates a generation they describe as religious but not necessarily religiously literate (Bagir, 2011, p. 64).

In addition to the core elements of dialogue and literacy, Achmad Asrori confidently argues that the religious education model in Indonesia will not endure in the context of Indonesia's multiculturalism. He contends that the mono-religious education model, or what

he calls religious education "in" the wall, contributes to shaping an exclusive model of religiosity. In contrast, religious education "at" and "beyond" the wall contributes to shaping an inclusive multiculturalist model of religiosity (Asrori, 2016, p. 260). Instead of teaching faith, according to Asrori, religious education would be more appropriate if directed towards dialoguing with social realities such as corruption, violence, ignorance, and the like. Students should stand together to fight against these natural enemies (Asrori, 2016, p. 65). Asrori's proposal is indeed essential and intriguing; however, the multiculturalism he refers to has not been empirically proven in the space of religious education in classrooms.

The need for development in the mono-religious model is examined by Suhadi Cholil in a research report titled "The Politics of Religious Education." Alongside other researchers, Cholil demonstrates that, in response to the challenges of multiculturalism, changes to education policies must begin with internal changes to the curriculum itself. Cholil argues that the main issue with religious education is not only related to policy patterns but also to the development of a dogmatic and normative curriculum. Dogmatism in religious education lies in the state's excessive emphasis on 'religious values' as the basis for education. Normativism in religious education lies in the model of religious education that is too regulated by the state (Suhadi, Mohamad Yusuf, Marthen Tahun, Budi Asyari, 2015, pp. 6–8). As a consequence, compulsory religious education fails to support tolerance and multiculturalism because its dogmatic and normative nature limits students from learning about religions other than their own. In practice, students rarely get the opportunity to engage in interreligious dialogue because they only encounter students of the same religion in classrooms.

Descriptively, the critics we mentioned above, namely Suhadi Cholil, Asrori, Mohamad Yusuf and Carl Sterkens, Zainal Abidin Bagir and Irwan Abdullah, indicate that the mono-religious model does not provide space for interreligious dialogue. However, in our view, their concerns are accurate when students in the same classroom come from the same religion. Yet, in reality, many students in schools, including SMAK BPK PENABUR, are forced to study religious education outside their beliefs due to the limitation of religious education teachers. Therefore, in our opinion, the mono-religious model of religious education also poses challenges for teachers and students who are forced to sit and learn in the same class due to the limitation of religious education teachers caused by the mono-religious education policy of the state. As a development in the research on mono-religiosity, this study will focus on the challenges of mono-religiosity from the perspective of religious education teachers.

Rethinking the Role of Religious Education Teachers

The study of the mono-religious model of religious education in Indonesia has yet to position teachers as the 'subjects' of inquiry. Research on the mono-religious model of religious education still predominantly focuses on policy issues and its development. Consequently, the role of teachers should be more noticed. In the studies conducted by researchers, teachers are placed as passive receivers of such laws. For example, Mohamad Yusuf writes that when the teacher employs the mono-religious model, he or she does it as a part of the collective consciousness of the religious community. Teachers perceive that the practice of the mono-religious model is in obedience to the State's and religious community's norms (Yusuf, 2016, p. 162). For us, Mohamad Yusuf's claim seems to generalise the position of teachers, as if teachers always welcome the mono-religious model of religious education. Teachers are portrayed as merely accepting and implementing the policy of the mono-religious model of religious education without any critical response. In our view, religious education teachers have a variety of critical responses to the mono-religious model of religious education.

Suhadi Cholil and his colleagues, in "Managing Diversity in Schools: Ideas and Experiences of Teachers," illustrate the diverse responses of teachers to the multicultural reality in schools. In this book, there is a notable article by Puji Handayani. Puji Handayani is an example of a religious education teacher critical of the mono-religious model of religious education. In her article, Puji Handayani, who works as a Christian religious education teacher, recounts the injustice experienced by her students due to receiving religious education lessons that do not align with their own beliefs. Puji then made significant efforts to provide a Buddhist religious education teacher for her students, and her efforts were successful. (Handayani, 2016, p. 100). Based on Puji's experience, we believe teachers in the field develop various strategies to accommodate inclusive religious education. Their experiences stem from the awareness that not all teachers feel comfortable teaching religious education to students with different beliefs or religions than the teacher's own.

Puji Handayani's experiences and tolerant attitude are also present in other religious education teachers. Puji's experience shows that religious education teachers have ways to accommodate students' rights to receive religious education according to their beliefs. In our opinion, Puji's actions follow a pattern similar to previous research. Puji and other researchers provide religious education services for students through advocacy. The advocacy approach is an effort to fulfil the right to religious education services based on the laws provided by the state. Therefore, the advocacy approach becomes one way to support the process of the mono-religious model of religious education.

In this study, we argue that the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR do not employ the advocacy approach. The teachers take a different approach by transforming the classroom to provide religious education services according to the student's beliefs. Therefore, in the following sections, we intend to examine how the teachers perceive the mono-religious model of religious education and the strategies they employ to go beyond it. We conducted research based on in-depth interviews with fellow teachers from SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta. This research seeks to describe and analyze how the teachers strategically provide the basis for religious education for non-Christian students in their respective classrooms.

Interviews and Analysis

In this research, we interviewed 20 teachers of Religious Education at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta out of 35 teachers we contacted. We utilized the in-depth interview approach proposed by Boyce and Neale. For them, in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Neale, 2006, p. 3). Therefore, the focus of these interviews revolves around three main topics, which constitute the core of this article, namely (1) teachers' perspectives on compulsory religious education, and (2) challenges and strategies in teaching Christianity to non-Christian students. We translated these two interview themes into various interview questions. The results of the interviews will be reported along with our responses to their answers.

The first theme, teachers' perspectives on the mono-religious education model as an implication of compulsory religious education, was discussed with the help of two key questions: (1) does a student need a religious teacher who shares the same faith with them? Moreover, (2) In your opinion, should religious education be compulsory in schools? Of the respondents to the first question, 19 answered yes, stating that students need to understand directly from a teacher who shares the same religious views. Interestingly, one teacher, Olivia from SMAK 3 BPN PENABUR Jakarta, answered 'no' because students should learn the richness of other religions (Interview, Olivia). For the second question, all teachers answered yes for various reasons. All teachers consider 'religion' an essential part of life; hence, education is crucial in a school context.

Regarding the second theme, challenges and strategies for teaching Christianity to non-Christian students, we used one question: What strategies do you use to provide religious education services for non-Christian students? Of the 20 respondents, all teachers agreed that

teaching Religious Education to students of different religions is a serious challenge. The main challenge is finding the proper teaching methods to prevent the subject from becoming a moment of Christianization. Heni Mailoa, a SMAK 1 BPK PENABUR Jakarta teacher, emphasized that Religious Education is not an act of Christianization but a moment to introduce Christianity to other religions (Interview, Mailoa). Therefore, we see that teachers are committed to religious diversity. This commitment leads them to seek appropriate methods independently. Teachers use some common perspectives and methods. Twelve respondents emphasized the importance of a 'universal language,' meaning a language that is not overly Christian so that students can understand unique concepts in Christian teachings. Eight respondents agreed with the universal language but added a primary emphasis on ethical aspects. Universal language denotes that Christian teachings teach students to understand human values. Teachers develop what they call 'equivalent values' in other religions. For example, teachers look for equivalent meanings of 'love' in Christian teachings within Islam, Buddhism, and so on.

Based on the above descriptions, we argue that teachers must adopt an advocacy approach to provide religious education services for non-Christian students. PAK teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta develop a learning model as the approach they take to engage Christian religious education with the beliefs of students from different religious backgrounds. Therefore, the approach they use, in our view, directly influences the content of Christian religious education.

Moving Beyond the Mono-Religious Model of Religious Education

Following enacting the 2003 National Education System Law and the 2007 Religious Education Law, Yusuf and Sterkens asserted that religious education in Indonesia is structured within a mono-religious paradigm (Yusuf & Sterkens, 2017, p. 168). This model is perceived to constrain inter-religious dialogue within the classroom. However, it is essential to note that, in our perspective, the mono-religious approach is not the sole paradigm for religious education. Drawing upon the experience at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta, it is observed that the mono-religious educational model poses challenges to implementing a multi-religious education framework. Nonetheless, educators at the institution have adeptly adapted the mono-religious model to facilitate religious education in alignment with the diverse beliefs of students within the class.

Despite SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta adhering to a mono-religious model of religious education as stipulated by educational regulations, teachers have taken proactive

measures to enhance their understanding of other religions. This initiative is undertaken to foster a more inclusive approach to Christian religious education. In this context, we characterize the actions and initiatives of teachers as "agency," a concept borrowed from Nancy Ammerman. Ammerman defines 'agency' as the negotiation between official religious authorities and everyday practice, often marked by contention, particularly concerning issues and practices related to the body (Nancy Tatom Ammerman, 2007, p. 14). In our perspective, the practices undertaken by teachers represent a form of agency. This is evident as teachers engage in negotiations regarding learning materials, striving to incorporate knowledge from various religions. The utilization of 'universal language' and the search for 'equivalent values' in other religions underscore that Christian Religious Education classes extend beyond the dissemination of exclusively Christian teachings. This deliberate process of integrating religious values serves as a means for teachers to negotiate learning materials, effectively addressing the educational requirements of non-Christian students.

In our perspective, the negotiation process serves as a means for teachers to surpass the constraints of the mono-religious model. The mono-religious model presupposes harmony among education, students, and religious subjects within the classroom. Contrary to the normative provisions of the 2003 Law and 2007 Law at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta, the PAK teachers employ teaching strategies that transcend the mono-religious policies outlined in the school system. Despite the overarching mono-religious regulations, the actual implementation reflects an interreligious model. This model includes education from two or more religions in the religious education curriculum. As the PAK PENABUR teacher explained, the interreligious model materializes through the PAK class, serving as a platform for acquiring knowledge about various religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Catholicism, and others. From our understanding, the interreligious model is a pervasive practice within PENABUR, as evidenced by the continuous adaptation of teaching materials to accommodate the diverse beliefs of students in the classroom.

From an agency perspective, it is evident that PAK teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR have developed strategic approaches to deliver religious education materials tailored to non-Christian students. This proactive strategy acts as a countermeasure to prevent the implementation of the mono-religious model mandated by state and school policies. The transformation of the PAK class into an interreligious education class signifies a shift where knowledge from various religions supports the teaching and learning processes in the classroom. However, the case at PENABUR underscores that mandatory religious education, as mandated by the 2003 National Education System Law and the 2007 Religious Education

Law, presents challenges for religious education teachers. The persistent use of the mono-religious model as the foundation for implementing religious education by the Indonesian state poses obstacles, particularly for schools that need a diverse pool of religious education teachers. As a result, the mono-religious model presents challenges in providing comprehensive religious education services. In response to the mono-religious policy enforced in their schools, teachers at SMAK BPK PENABUR have chosen to develop interreligious education models to address these challenges better. This adaptation reflects the commitment of teachers to ensure inclusive religious education despite systemic challenges.

Conclusion

The enforcement of mandatory religious education has led to establishing a mono-religious model within schools. This model manifests in dogmatic and normative practices in implementing religious education in Indonesia. The mono-religious approach assumes a learning process solely oriented towards the beliefs of a single religion, as held by both students and teachers. In practical terms, the mono-religious model poses challenges to executing religious education at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta, given the diverse beliefs of students and teachers within the classroom. This diversity hinders the seamless implementation of a mono-religious education process. The research conducted at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta demonstrates that mono-religiousness challenges teachers in teaching and learning activities. The complexities arising from this challenge prompt teachers to transform the mono-religious model into an interreligious one. This transformation is seen as a strategic response to the impediments posed by the mono-religious model and reflects a commitment to creating a more inclusive religious education environment that accommodates the diverse beliefs of both students and teachers.

The interreligious model serves as a testament to the challenges posed by the mono-religious education mandated by the Indonesian state for teachers and students of different religions. Despite the requirement for mono-religious education within the school system, PAK teachers at PENABUR, adopting an agency approach, negotiate over learning materials. These negotiations incorporate perspectives from various religions aligned with the beliefs of non-Christian students in their classes. In defiance of the school system's insistence on mono-religious education, PAK teachers at PENABUR demonstrate an agency-driven transformation of PAK classes into an interreligious education format. This transformation reflects the teachers' commitment to overcoming the limitations of the mono-religious model, allowing for a more inclusive educational experience that considers the diverse beliefs present among

students. In essence, the teachers actively contribute to the evolution from a mono-religious to an interreligious model, showcasing their agency in shaping the educational landscape.

Indeed, expanding the research to include students' perspectives is a valuable next step for a comprehensive understanding of interreligious development at SMAK BPK PENABUR Jakarta. By incorporating students' voices, researchers can gain insights into the dynamics and challenges experienced by students with diverse religious beliefs within the context of the evolving interreligious model. This two-directional approach, involving both teachers and students, would provide a more holistic view of the impact and effectiveness of the transition from the mono-religious to the interreligious model. It allows for a nuanced exploration of how the interactions and negotiations between teachers and students contribute to the development and success of an inclusive religious education environment. Additionally, understanding students' perspectives adds depth to the analysis by capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of those directly affected by the shift in religious education practices. Incorporating both teacher and student voices in the research would contribute to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the interreligious model's implications and shed light on how the educational community collectively navigates the challenges associated with diverse religious beliefs within the school environment.

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