

MUSLIMS IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND COPING MECHANISMS

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Abstract

This research investigates the challenges faced by Muslim teachers, academic staff, and students who experienced difficulties when having become involved in a Catholic high school, and uncovers the coping mechanisms they use to overcome the challenges they face due to differences in beliefs and habits. This research uses descriptive qualitative analysis with data collection tools in open questionnaires and in-depth interviews with educators, academic staff, and students regarding the challenges and coping mechanisms they used while involved in Catholic high schools in Indonesia. In this research it has been significantly demonstrated that educators, academic staff, and Muslim students involved in Catholic religious education units cannot avoid challenges, whether they arise from differences in perspective, worship habits, values, the involvement of close relatives, or even special policies established by the school for Muslims. However, each challenge faced by each educator, academic staff, and student has its their own coping mechanism, thus contributing positively to enriching tolerance between religious communities without damaging Islamic values and faith of Muslims in the professional realm.

Keywords: Muslim, Catholic High School, Indonesia, coping mechanisms

Introduction

Indonesia is a multicultural country. Due to its diversity, there are many types of religions practiced by Indonesian people, namely Islam, Christianity, in particular Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Because of this heterogeneity of cultures and beliefs, Indonesia has the motto "Unity in Diversity" (*Bhineka Tunggal Ika*) which means that even though we are different, we are still one.¹

In Indonesian education system, each province has many schools with various religious backgrounds, including Catholic high schools and vocational schools. This challenges Muslim students, teachers, and academic staff to adapt and understand different school cultures.

In the current era of globalization, the issue of tolerance and inclusion is very important to study. The presence of Muslim students, teachers, and academic staff in Catholic schools opens up opportunities to evaluate the existing level of tolerance and inclusion. Inclusive schools have the principle of openness to all circles of people.² Inclusive schools are committed to applying multicultural insights to the teaching and learning process that can encourage students to be able to respect those who are different from them in ethnicity, culture, values, personality as well as physical and psychological functions.³ This research was conducted in order to identify challenges and coping mechanisms carried out by teachers, staff and high school students in Indonesia. The results obtained can expand insight into diversity in the school environment and provide preferential solutions in facing challenges related to dealing with diversity in the school environment.

Literature Review

Muslim Educators, Academic Staff, and Students in Catholic Institutions

The distinct challenges faced by Muslim educators in multicultural settings, particularly within rural schools, often include navigating professional identity in the face of resource constraints and varied student demographics.⁴

The role of schools as institutions is to develop the human potential of children, enabling them to fulfill the tasks of life as individuals and members of society. Activities to develop potential must be carried out in a planned, directed, and systematic manner to achieve the set goals. The goals must contain values that are in harmony with the culture of the community that provides education as an educational institution, seen from a social and spiritual perspective, functioning to develop mental attitudes that are closely related to the norms of life.⁵

Inclusion is an ideological system based on the insight of togetherness. This means that all school members, including the community, school principals, teachers, foundation administrators, school administration officers, students, and parents, are aware of their shared responsibility in educating all students to optimize their potential so that they can develop optimally.⁶

The values implemented by Catholic schools in Indonesia are: 1) the value and spirit of brotherly love, 2) deep faith in God, 3) social values and justice, 4) morality, and 5) intellectuality.⁷

Adjustments to diversity must be made by the school's academic community so that those involved get their rights as religious people in the educational environment.⁸ They have to adjust to many aspects of school life, such as academic challenges, social isolation, and cultural adjustments.⁹ In several areas, Catholic schools have a good reputation in the eyes of parents, so even Muslim parents send their children to Catholic schools for quality education.¹⁰

In the view of religions in Indonesia, especially Islam, it is emphasized that: 1) humans are born in a pure state, 2) a person's glory is not due to physical appearance, but piety, 3) Allah Almighty will not change the fate of a people unless the people themselves do it (Holy Qur'ān 13:11), 4) humans are created differently -different people to stay in touch with each other.¹¹ Even though most Catholic schools have the same curriculum as general State Schools, Muslims involved in the Catholic school environment are confronted with ideologies that contrast with their ideology as Muslims.¹²

Challenges of Muslims in a Catholic Environment

Based on the results of a research conducted by Naparan and Balinbangan¹³, challenges most commonly faced by Muslims students involved in Catholic institutions are 1) the obligation to attend religious activities; 2) there is a compulsory Catholic religious course;

3) difficulty carrying out the prescribed Islamic worship (prayer or fasting); 4) there is a mandatory schedule on Friday from 11:00-13:00; 5) intolerant parties or individuals; 6) debate with family or close relatives regarding the decision to work or study at a Catholic institution; and 7) difficulty of adjusting to oneself, both from relationships and a sense of belonging in the work or school environment. These challenges highlight the importance of coping mechanisms that enable Muslim teachers, Academic staff and students to negotiate their religious identity, maintain their spiritual commitments, and develop positive relationships within Catholic educational environments.

Coping Mechanisms

The emotions and physiological arousal produced by stressful situations are very uncomfortable, and this discomfort motivates individuals to try to relieve it. The process used by a person who handles stressful demands is called coping (the ability to overcome problems) and has two main forms. People may focus on a specific problem or situation that has occurred while trying to find ways to change it or avoid it in the future. This is called a problem-focused strategy. A person can also focus on eliminating emotions related to stressful situations, even if the situation cannot be changed. This second process is called an emotion-focused strategy.¹⁴ When dealing with stressful situations, most people use both. This issue is equally relevant for Muslim teachers, academic staff, and students participating in Catholic religious education systems. The capacity to develop effective coping mechanisms is crucial for maintaining productivity without compromising moral values that are firmly grounded in Islamic '*Aqīdah*' ("creed").

Problem Focused Strategy

Strategies for solving problems include determining the problem, creating alternative solutions, weighing alternatives regarding their costs and benefits, choosing one of them, and implementing the chosen alternative. Problem-focused strategies can also be directed inward: people can change something in themselves rather than changing the environment. Changing aspiration levels, finding alternative sources of satisfaction are other possibilities.¹⁵

Emotion Focused Strategy

People use emotion-focused strategies to prevent negative emotions from overwhelming them to such degree which would

prevent them from taking action to solve their problems. They also use emotion-focused strategies if a problem cannot be controlled. Emotionally focused strategies, can be done in two ways, namely as behavioural strategies and cognitive strategies¹⁶: Behavioural strategies include doing physical exercise to divert your mind from problems, using alcohol or other drugs, channeling your anger, and seeking emotional support from your closest friends. Cognitive strategy is by temporarily eliminating thoughts about the problem (for example, “I decided not to worry about that problem”) and reducing the threat by changing the meaning of the situation (“I decided that my friendship is not important to me”). Cognitive strategies require reappraisal of the situation.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the experience of Muslim educators, academic staff, and students within Catholic educational institutions in Indonesia. A case study approach was appropriate because the research focused on a limited setting and sought to understand participants’ lived experiences in depth within their institutional, social, and religious context.

Sampling Strategy

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. This strategy was used to ensure that the study included individuals who had direct experience of being Muslim in Catholic school environments and who could provide rich, relevant, and informative accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. This research was conducted in 15 Catholic high schools and vocational schools spread across Indonesia. It involved 47 Muslim subjects who were 20 Muslim students, 10 educators, and 17 academic staff in schools managed by the Catholic Community Foundation in Indonesia.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide was developed from the literature about Muslim challenges in Catholic educational environment¹⁷ and was designed to explore participants’ experiences of adjustment, institutional challenges, coping mechanisms, and the maintenance of religious identity in Catholic school settings. The questions are structured based on the following outline: 1) The obligation to attend religious

activities. 2) Is there a compulsory Catholic religious course? 3) Difficulty carrying out the prescribed Islamic worship (prayer or fasting). 4) Is there a mandatory schedule on Friday from 11:00-13:00? 5) Intolerant parties or individuals. 6) Debate with family or close relatives regarding the decision to work or study in a Catholic institution. 7) Difficulty of adjusting to oneself, both from relationships and a sense of belonging in the work or school environment. 8) Coping mechanisms through challenges.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.¹⁸ The steps of thematic analysis in this study are described in the following table:

Thematic analysis steps	Practical application for research
1. Familiarization with the data	Transcribing and rereading data
2. Generating initial codes	Meaningful text segments were coded sequentially according to the challenges faced by the participants (method of Napparan and Balimbangan 2020 for descriptive coding of Muslim Challenges in Catholic school).
3. Searching for themes	Related codes were then grouped into categories based on participants' answers regarding coping mechanisms (Folkman's 2013 methods for group coding (themes) to respondents' coping mechanisms).
4. Reviewing themes	Check that the extracted data match the themes.
5. Defining and naming themes	Define the respondent's statement and improve it so that the information obtained from the respondent can be organized according to the theme.

6. Writing report	Selecting clear and compelling citations, analyzing the selected citations, linking the analysis back to research and literature questions, and producing scientific reports on those analyses.
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Table 1. The steps of thematic analysis

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations include providing information about the nature of the research, voluntary participation, permission to record interviews, and confidentiality of participant identities both in recordings, transcripts and in full descriptions.¹⁹

Research Findings and Discussion

Before data collection began, researchers first recorded the whereabouts of Muslim educators, academic staff, and students who have worked or studied in Catholic schools throughout Indonesia either via WhatsApp or by meeting in person at schools. Data related to research school contact persons were obtained from alumni networks and relations related to the research profession.

From several schools contacted and visited, researchers found the following results: a) most of the Catholic schools contacted had Muslim educators, academic staff, and students who were willing to participate in the research; b) there are Catholic schools without educators, academic staff or students of Muslim faith, because no Muslims has ever applied for jobs or registered for study, but the school states that it remains open and would accept qualified Muslim job-applicants or Muslim students; c) there are Catholic schools that do have Muslim educators, academic staff and students but are not willing to provide research permission for reasons of protecting the privacy of the school and related parties.

Based on these conditions, 15 schools that have been contacted or visited directly, only 11 Catholic schools can provide information related to this research, With 47 suitable research subjects, namely Muslim 10 teachers, 17 academic staff and 20 students, and all of them are willing to run an interview. Following table for more details:

Catholic Schools	Reachable Contact (email/ WhatsApp/ direct meeting, ordinary mail)	Research Permission	Interview	Muslim Respondents			Remarks
				Educator	Academic Staff	Student	
School 1	✓			✓	✓	✓	Decline to provide information
School 2	✓			x	x	x	No response
School 3	✓			✓	✓	✓	Decline to provide information
School 4	✓			x	x	x	No suitable research subjects
School 5	✓			3	6	12	interviewed
School 6	✓			1	1	1	interviewed
School 7	✓			5	4	2	interviewed

School 8	✓			×	×	1	interviewed
School 9	✓			×	1	2	interviewed
School 10	✓			×	1	×	interviewed
School 11	✓			×	×	1	interviewed
School 12	✓			1	4	×	interviewed
School 13	✓	×	×	×	×	×	No Response
School 14	✓		×	×	×	×	No suitable research subjects
School 15	✓			×	×	1	interviewed

Table 2. Research Access, Permission, and Participant Recruitment in Catholic Schools

Challenges Faced by Muslims Involved In Catholic Schools

1. The obligation to attend regular Catholic worship services

Regarding the obligation to participate in Catholic worship, such as regular mass, first Friday, and others, it was found that each school has different policies. These include: 1) educators and staff are free to choose to attend mandatory worship or not, but it is compulsory for students. This policy is linked to agreements between Muslim parents and the school at registration, where parents sign a document agreeing to their children's participation in activities with a Catholic context, such as Catholic Religious Education, Character Education, regular mass, and celebrating Catholic holidays. The experiences of Muslim Students in attending Catholic subjects and Masses can foster inclusivity and respect, some of them are still hesitant because these activities are contrary to their beliefs and practice. However, they provides an opportunity for connection with fellow worshippers and contributes to a more inclusive and diverse religious landscape on school.²⁰ 2) Educators and academic staff may choose to attend Catholic celebrations at school. As a gesture of tolerance, many decide to attend mass but do not participate in all rituals, such as communion, reciting the creed, prayers, or singing Catholic songs which are the ways they navigate their religious identity²¹, educators who attend often take the initiative to manage students during mass, including seating arrangements and noise control. 3) One of the schools examined does not require Muslim educators and staff to attend mandatory Catholic worship and provides holidays for Muslim staff and students on days designated for such worship.

Although the Catholic Church has a missionary dimension, the education system in Indonesia is governed by a constitution and laws and regulations that guarantee freedom of religion and prohibit forced conversion.²² In the context of this study, there was no evidence of institutional efforts to encourage religious conversion among students, teachers and academic staff. If there is a case of conversion, the phenomenon is understood as a personal decision influenced by various social, psychological, and family factors, not as a direct consequence of attendance at a Catholic school.²³

2. The obligation to participate in the celebration of Catholic holidays

Some of the conditions faced by students, educators and academic staff related to the celebration of Catholic holidays in schools are that the followers of Islam in the school are given the freedom to choose whether or not to attend the celebrations of Catholics that are celebrated, most of them choose to attend for family reasons, provided that the food served during the celebration is *halāl* food. Celebrating religious holidays in schools is an important aspect

in implementing the values of tolerance and inclusivity within a multicultural education system, in a pluralistic country like Indonesia. In Catholic schools, the two main liturgical celebrations which are often shared are Christmas and Easter. Both activities are institutionally organized by the school and are expected to be attended by all academic community, including educators, academic staff, and students. However, the attendance policy is not compulsory for Muslim teachers, academic staff and students. Muslims in Catholic schools are not required to attend Mass or worship services that are specifically Catholic rituals (e.g., the Christmas Mass or the Stations of the Cross at Easter).²⁴ This policy reflects institutional efforts to balance participation in communal celebrations with the principle of religious freedom guaranteed by Indonesia's national education constitution. Previous studies have shown that implementing religious tolerance policies in schools includes developing strategies that enable teacher and students from different religious backgrounds to participate without violating their own religious beliefs, as well as fostering mutual respect and appreciation for differences.²⁵

Another aspect of the inclusive policy in Catholic schools is the provision of *halāl* food during religious celebrations. This step not only shows respect for the food needs of Muslims but also affirms the principles of justice and respect for religious differences in daily school practices. *Halāl* food is a form of inclusive institutional adaptation that has been empirically proven to increase the comfort and participation of all parties in joint activities without discrimination. Studies on multicultural education show that facilities and policies that are responsive to the needs of religious minorities such as the provision of meals in accordance with religious rules contribute significantly to the development of a school environment that fosters mutual respect and supports social cohesion among students of different religious backgrounds.²⁶

3. Obligation for students to take Catholic subjects

Based on the interviews, students confirmed that they were required to take Catholic subjects while studying at the relevant Catholic school. This relates to an agreement with parents before sending their children to Catholic school. Some schools have a policy requiring Muslim parents who send their children to Catholic schools to sign a statement confirming their agreement to their children taking Catholicism courses, but some schools do not have a written agreement regarding this. The participation of Muslim students in Catholic education-based schools is socially and ethically acceptable

if it is accompanied by policy transparency and respect for religious freedom. From the perspective of human rights and pluralistic education, parental consent serves as a form of negotiation between the right of the institution to maintain its religious character and the right of students not to suffer the coercion of their beliefs. Thus, the requirement for Muslim students to attend Catholic Religious Education, accompanied by parental consent, can be understood as an institutional strategy to maintain a balance between the school's identity and the principle of religious tolerance in education.²⁷

4. Difficulty carrying out obligatory worship as a Muslim

Most Muslims involved in schools, especially teachers and academic staff, do not experience difficulties in carrying out Islamic obligatory worship at school. This is indicated by the school providing a special room and time for Muslims to perform the 5 daily prayers. A policy that provides flexibility for non-Catholics, especially Muslims, is a policy that has been agreed upon by the school foundation leadership as a form of manifestation of Catholic schools that channel God's love to humanity regardless of religious differences.²⁸ However, flexibility is not very relevant for students in one of the 4 schools studied, this is also experienced by many Muslims who study in Catholic schools both at home and abroad related to the determination of the lesson schedule.²⁹ Obstacles are experienced in carrying out Obligatory prayers for male Muslims, namely Friday prayers, where students have difficulty carrying out obligatory Friday prayers and coming to school on time because the two activities are carried out at conflicting times. On the other hand, most Catholic schools deliberately empty their lesson hours right at the time of prayer, to be tolerant of Muslims involved in the school, so that they can flexibly carry out worship, especially Friday prayers. For instance, studies on interfaith dialogue often highlight the importance of shared experiences, respect for diverse practices, and proactive efforts to include religious minorities in community life as ways to build cohesive environments.

From the various challenges encountered in fulfilling the obligation to perform mandatory prayers, the study found that most teachers, academic staff and students continue to perform prayers according to the available time, either through the use of the space provided or adjusting the rest time. Most Catholic schools have provided special places for Muslim teachers, academic staff and students. As for schools that do not provide a place for prayers, they can instead give special permission for teachers, academic staff and

Muslim students to perform prayers at the nearest mosque to the school which shows the synergy between the Catholic school and the worship needs of teachers, academic staff and students of different religions in fulfilling easy access to worship.³⁰ Although there is an understanding of combined prayers (*jama'*) that provide flexibility in the implementation of prayers for Muslims who are constrained by time and facilities, in the Indonesian context there are different views between Islamic scholars and organizations (*Nahdatul Ulama*, *Muhammadiyah* and The Indonesian Ulema Council)³¹, so its application depends on certain conditions and is not always a common practice for Muslim teachers, academic staff and students in Catholic schools. Thus, the strategy that is more often found is that they always try to pray according to the time and use of prayer rooms to maintain the continuity of worship.

5. Possibility of Discriminatory Treatment

Most educators and academic staff, stated that they have not encountered any form of discrimination while joining Catholic schools, but rather tolerance was often shown in the form of; a) being invited to eat together; b) reminding Muslims about food containing non-*halāl* elements; c) being given permission to celebrate Muslim holidays; d) being allowed to perform prayers even though teaching hours were still ongoing; e) giving congratulations on Islamic holidays; f) not eating and drinking openly in front of Muslims who were fasting. Schools and workplaces that actively promote cultural and religious sensitivity create environments where minority groups feel respected and included. This can include accommodating religious holidays, dietary restrictions, and prayer times, which align with the tolerant gestures.³² Such sensitivity is crucial for the well-being and integration of minority students and staff.³³

Related to the existence of intolerant individuals towards Muslims in schools, most teachers stated that there were no intolerant Catholic educators and academic staff in schools, the intolerant individuals came from among students from one of the schools studied. The incidents happened either between fellow students or between students and teachers.

In this study, the forms of intolerance that were found, did not come from teachers and academic staffs, but often emerged among students, in verbal form, such as satirizing the religious status of Muslim students and cultural differences that Catholic students said contradicted their beliefs, (e.g. Muslims are forbidden to eat pork). In

some cases, respondents admitted that exclusive and provocative religious statements triggered intense emotional responses, leading to aggressive actions, even physical violence, framed as self-defense or maintaining religious honor. Religious-based verbal intolerance has a high potential to escalate into physical violence when the narrative of "defending the faith" is used to justify vigilante acts. In this context, religion becomes not only a personal identity but also a moral symbol that can be mobilized to justify intolerant actions, especially if it is not balanced with inclusive religious literacy and fair conflict resolution mechanisms.³⁴

Another form of intolerance was reported by a Muslim woman respondent who worked as an educator in a Catholic education-based school, she stated that the form of intolerance came from the policy of school institutions that indirectly discriminated against Muslim educators and academic staff. One of the policies that is often encountered is the prohibition or restriction of the use of Islamic religious attributes, such as the *hijab*, for *Muslimah* teachers. In some cases, *Muslimah* teachers are advised to wear clothing deemed to conform to the institution's aesthetic standards, such as short skirts or tightfitting clothing, which substantially contradicts with *Muslimah* women value and dress principles as written in *Surah Al Aḥzāb* (Q. 33: 59), as well as the opinion of scholars who say that the aura of Muslim women is all parts of their body, except the head (including the face and hair), neck, both hands to the elbows and both feet to the knees, because all of these parts of the body are used in daily work.³⁵

In addition, discriminatory institutional policies are also reflected in the limited access of Muslim educators and academic staff to stable employment positions, such as permanent teaching or fixed-salary administrative positions, even after years of work. This practice exhibits structural inequalities in employment opportunities that are often not explicitly stated but persist through opaque selection and promotion mechanisms. Research on discrimination in education has revealed that Muslim workers, especially women, face dual challenges due to their religion and gender which leads to a lack of security and professional marginalization.³⁶

Although some Catholic schools are demonstrating normative efforts to build a more inclusive environment for religious minorities, empirical findings and the scientific literature show that institutional discrimination persists, especially against Muslim women. This shows that faith-based educational institutions, despite their moral missions and the humanitarian values they uphold, are not entirely immune to

worldly social biases. Therefore, intolerance in the context of education needs to be understood not only as a matter of individual attitudes but also as a structural problem embedded in institutional policies and practices. A critical approach to school policy is important to ensure that the principles of tolerance, justice, and equality are truly applied in interfaith educational practices.³⁷

6. Family Support in Deciding to Join a Catholic School

Most respondents considered that there was no interference related to the decision to work or study at the Catholic school concerned. This was influenced by several factors, including: 1) they considered that the decision was made consciously both mentally and psychologically, for religious minority individuals navigating potentially challenging educational environments, family encouragement can significantly bolster their confidence and ability to cope. Religious education in families is also critical for resilience among minority Muslim educators, academic staff and students ; 2) students were accustomed to being sent to Catholic schools by their parents since kindergarten, when family members are graduates of Catholic schools, this suggests an intergenerational transfer of educational values and experiences that can normalize and even favour such choices. This informal transmission of cultural and educational values within the family context can reduce apprehension and foster acceptance of non-Islamic educational settings³⁸; 3) Muslim parents who send their children to Catholic schools because of the competitive quality of the school and adequate facilities, 4) families fully support them because they come from heterogeneous religions and many are graduates of Catholic schools, Families with heterogeneous religious backgrounds may inherently foster a greater degree of religious tolerance and openness. Parents play a crucial role in cultivating values of tolerance from an early age, helping children respect people of different faiths.³⁹ This familial experience with religious diversity could make the decision to join a Catholic school seem less daunting and more aligned with existing family values of interfaith understanding. Studies on religious homogamy versus heterogamy suggest that parental background can influence attitudes towards religious groups , implying that experience with diverse faiths within a family might lead to greater acceptance of interfaith educational environments.⁴⁰

Regarding the role of parents who involve their children in Catholic schools, it is often possible to balance the formal education obtained in Catholic schools with additional religious education

through *madrasah diniyah*, al-Qur'an education gardens (TPA/TPQ), mosque recitations, private Qur'an reading courses and other Islamic educational institutions with varied implementation times, such as in the afternoon after formal school hours or on weekends. These findings suggest that families play a central role in maintaining the continuity of children's religious identity and competence. Not only through the extension of Islamic institutions and communities, but also combined with education that is directly practiced by the parents by becoming role models (*uswah-i-ḥasanah*), habituation methods, advice (*mau'izah*) methods, attention, and methods of punishment.⁴¹ Thus, children's religious education takes place through formal education in Catholic schools and family- and community-based religious education.

7. Difficulty of Adjusting

Based on respondents' statements, difficulties are generally experienced initially upon joining a Catholic school until individuals can finally adapt easily. Regarding adaptation difficulties for Muslim educators or academic staff, these are not always pronounced. This is attributed to several factors: 1) some educators have experience teaching in **peripheral, isolated, and disadvantaged areas** (3T areas – *Tertinggal* i.e. Underdeveloped, *Terdepan* i.e. Frontier, and *Terluar* i.e. Outermost) where the community is predominantly Catholic; 2) some teachers, academic staffs, and Muslim students come from Catholic families; 3) they possess a high level of tolerance, supported by heterogeneous family and environmental education; and 4) some Muslim students are alumni of Catholic elementary and junior high schools. However, students do encounter specific challenges, which are also highlighted in broader research on Muslim students in religious education settings.⁴² These include 1) being asked to lead a prayer that, while directed to God in their respective religions, follows a format typically associated with Catholic worship. This can lead to difficulties due to mandatory Catholic practices impacting non-Catholic students 2) Further difficulties arise in adjusting to a school environment with very strong Catholic characteristics, reflecting general challenges of inclusion for minority religious students in denominational schools. 3) Moreover, students experience challenges when taking Catholic Religious and moral Education lessons, particularly those involving memorization of gospel verses from the New and Old Testaments. Such experiences underscore the complexities faced by Muslim students navigating unfamiliar doctrines within Catholic religious education curricula.

Related to this discussion, the long-term implications that will be experienced by Muslim students who will become graduates of Catholic schools. In the pluralistic Indonesian context, Catholic school backgrounds are generally not a formal barrier to getting a job because the recruitment process emphasizes more academic competence, skills, and experience.⁴³ Some studies have also shown that learning experiences in diverse environments can strengthen cross-cultural communication skills, tolerance, and social adaptation which has the potential to be an added value in the world of work.⁴⁴ However, there are undeniable challenges, especially when individuals interact with social environments that have strong perceptions of religious identity. Therefore, the impact is understood as situational and influenced by different social contexts.⁴⁵

Coping Mechanism

Educators, academic staffs, and students who face difficulties share similar ways of adapting and coping with challenges. Most respondents said they focus on effective communication when dealing with issues that conflict with their Muslim beliefs. Besides communication, Muslim educators, staff, and students have various ways to handle unpleasant situations related to their faith at school, using both words and actions. Some of the actions they take include:

Problem Focused Strategy

1. Seeking a safe space to talk, such as with friends, psychologists, or parents, this demonstrates the importance of social support networks for individuals in minority settings. External research confirms that social support, including from peers and teachers, significantly contributes to the well-being of minority youth in schools⁴⁶, for religious minorities, particularly Muslim individuals, having spaces and individuals where they can openly discuss challenges without fear of judgment is vital for their mental health and well-being.⁴⁷ This also touches upon the general concept of "trusted guidance" as a dimension of emotional support⁴⁸;
2. Muslim teachers and academic staffs will respect the school's policy as long as it does not conflict with Islamic law and their rights as Muslims. They do not hesitate to take firm steps in the form of resignation if there are human rights violations that interfere with their freedom as religious people and professionals. There is an important principle that must be possessed by a Muslim as a form of mastery, namely the concept of *washathiyah*

(Islamic Moderation) in tolerance.⁴⁹ Where there is great harmony, individuals can express their religious identity at work, leading to positive outcomes. Conversely, a lack of compatibility can lead to identity tensions and potentially to an individual choosing to leave the environment. It is important for institutions to consider aspects of diversity management in their educational environment. Organizations that adopt a "religiously friendly" approach, characterized by proactive inclusion, tend to have higher educators and academic staff satisfaction and lower turnover intentions among educators and academic staff of all religious identities.⁵⁰ This suggests that proactively accommodating religious needs can prevent conflicts that can lead to resignation. In this context, reference to *Surah Al-Kāfirūn*, verse 6, "*To you is your religion, and to me is my religion*," underscores the principle of religious autonomy and the supreme authority of Islamic law in personal and professional decisions. When religious issues arise at work that conflict with *Sharī'ah*, such as restrictions on prayer or other religious duties, they can lead to significant challenges for Muslim educators and academic staff. The choice to resign rather than violate Islamic law is a manifestation of adhering to these principles.

Emotion Focused Strategy

1. At first practicing patience and self-control, then discussing the issue with those involved. This demonstrates a reliance on internal spiritual fortitude, which is a recognized form of religious coping.⁵¹ Research on Muslim students often identifies religious coping strategies, such as worship (in heart, verbally, and by action), as effective in managing academic stress and promoting well-being.⁵² If the situation is too overwhelming, they choose to resign;
2. Engaging in positive activities to help find solutions, the idea of "doing positive activities to make problem solving easier" can be seen as a form of active coping or diversionary coping. In broader context, individuals facing stress often engage in leisure activities such as watching movies, reading, participating in sports, or meeting with friends to manage stress and foster well-being⁵³, as Muslims, positive activity can be formed by religious coping strategies are effective in managing stress and promoting well-being among Muslim students, engaging in worship "in the

heart, verbally, and by action" ⁵⁴ can provide a sense of security, support, and safety ;

3. Consulting religious leaders who are trusted and knowledgeable for calming advices underscores the role of spiritual guidance and religious authority in navigating interfaith challenges. Religious leaders can play a significant role in conflict resolution and providing moral authority, especially in contexts where religious values are central to identity.⁵⁵ In this regard, it is crucial for teachers, academic staff, and students to carefully select effective religious leaders within an interfaith context. This consideration can be assessed by examining whether the religious leaders consulted have the ability to uphold their own religious convictions without negating the existence or legitimacy of other religious traditions. Exclusivist theological orientations, by contrast, have the potential to reinforce polarization⁵⁶, which may further exacerbate the psychological and emotional well-being of Muslim teachers, academic staff, and students as they carry out their daily activities within a Catholic school environment.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that Muslims involved in the Catholic education system in Indonesia experience challenges. These challenges stem from the institutional obligations of Catholic institutions, including participation in mandatory religious services, celebrations of Catholic holidays, mandatory religious instruction, and limited opportunities for Muslim women to fully fulfill their *Muslimah* roles in terms of their appearance. Additional difficulties include potential discrimination and the psychological difficulties Muslims face in adapting to a religious environment different from their own. The findings also revealed that Muslims working in Catholic schools can improve psychological strategies in the form of coping mechanisms to address challenges without sacrificing their Islamic values. This includes strengthening self-control with an emotion-focused strategy, which is evident in the way Muslims seek social support, engage in positive activities, consult with religious authorities, and even take decisive action, such as resigning as a preventative measure if something contradicts their faith.

This study has been limited to the involvement of Muslims in Catholic high schools. Future research is recommended to

examine the challenges faced by Muslims in the broader educational workplace, particularly religious universities.

Notes and References

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