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Different Forms of Religious Understanding: Cognitive Tolerance in Indonesia and England

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Abstract

Religious education is often expected to promote tolerance, but respect for religious difference does not necessarily ensure accurate understanding of religious others. This study examines how religious education policies in Indonesia and England emphasize different forms of cognitive tolerance. Using qualitative document analysis and comparative policy analysis, the study analyzes selected legal, curricular, and pedagogical documents through four components: Knowledge of Religious Others, Recognition of Internal Diversity, Critical Reflection, and Understanding Commonalities and Differences. Indonesian policy gives greater relative emphasis to understanding commonalities and differences within religion-specific formation, social harmony, and responsible citizenship. English policy gives greater emphasis to critical reflection and knowledge of religious and non-religious worldviews through shared enquiry. Recognition of Internal Diversity appears in similar proportions in both datasets, but it serves different curricular functions. The findings show differently configured pathways toward cognitive tolerance, combining the same cognitive components with different relative emphases and curricular purposes.

Keywords: cognitive tolerance, religious education, Indonesia, England, religious diversity, policy analysis

Introduction

Religious education is often expected to cultivate tolerance by equipping students to live constructively with religious difference. Tolerance, however, involves more than positive attitudes or peaceful behavior. It also has a cognitive dimension: people interpret the beliefs, practices, identities, and differences they are expected to tolerate. Students may therefore be taught to respect religious others while still possessing limited, stereotyped, or overly simplified understanding of them.¹ This raises an important question for religious education: what forms of understanding are required for tolerance to translate into meaningful interaction across religious difference?

Tolerance education is shaped at several levels, including national regulation, curriculum guidelines, local administration, and classroom implementation. This article focuses on the policy and curriculum guidance levels. Policies that emphasize tolerance, harmony, or peaceful coexistence do not necessarily ensure that students learn how religious others understand themselves. A curriculum may encourage positive conduct while presenting religions through simplified descriptions, official doctrines, or broad labels. Religious knowledge is therefore not separate from tolerance education. The ways students learn to understand, interpret, and compare religious difference form part of the cognitive foundation upon which tolerant attitudes and interactions can develop.²

Existing research has made substantial contributions to understanding tolerance education through pluralistic religious education, religious literacy, worldview pedagogy, teacher perspectives, and the representation of religion. These approaches illuminate important aspects of how students encounter and understand religious difference. However, these cognitive processes are not always examined explicitly as part of tolerance itself. Studies of tolerance often emphasize attitude, behaviors, or educational outcomes, while studies of religious knowledge and worldviews frequently pursue broader educational aims. This leaves less attention to the particular forms of knowledge and interpretation that constitute the cognitive dimension of tolerance and to how these are emphasized within policy itself.

Indonesia and England provide a contrasting foundation for examining these differences. In Indonesia, the legal and curricular framework connects religious education with faith, moral character, “*Pancasila*” values, social harmony, and responsible citizenship. English religious education is generally organized as a shared curricular subject in which students study multiple religious and non-religious worldviews.³ Recent developments have increasingly adopted the language of Religion and Worldviews, with greater attention given to lived religion, personal and organized

¹ Patricia Hannam et al., “Religious literacy: a way forward for religious education?,” *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 41, no. 2 (2020): 214–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2020.1736969>; Bagong Suyanto et al., “Problems of religious literacy in Indonesian education,” *Journal of Religious Education* 72 (2024): 165–81, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-024-00228-1>.

² Mun'im Sirry et al., “Teachers’ perspectives on tolerance education in Indonesian high schools,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 46, no. 4 (2024): 505–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2345213>; Fardan Mahmudatul Imamah and Hongsok Lee, “Bridging the Gap: Exploring Religious Literacy as an Alternative Approach to Religious Education in Indonesia,” *Analisa: Journal of Social Science and Religion* 9, no. 1 (2024): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v9i1.2136>.

³ Tower Hamlets Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, *Tower Hamlets Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2022–2027* (London: Tower Hamlets Council, 2022), 8–19.

worldviews, interpretation, substantive knowledge, and critical reflection. These structural differences do not mean that one system is tolerant and the other intolerant. They do, however, create different curricular conditions for understanding religious diversity.

The relationship between religious understanding and tolerance also has theological significance. Religious education does not operate only with neutral information about religion; it engages traditions that make claims about truth, authority, identity, and moral life. The challenge of tolerance is therefore not simply to reduce disagreement, but to consider how students can understand religious others fairly while remaining situated within particular religious or non-religious commitments. This is especially important in confessional forms of religious education, where formation within a tradition is an explicit educational goal, but it is also relevant to multireligious approaches that seek to take religious commitments seriously as objects of study. Examining cognitive tolerance therefore raises a broader question about whether commitment, disagreement, and accurate understanding of religious others can coexist within religious education.

The article addresses this gap through a comparative analysis of selected religious education policy documents from Indonesia and England. It asks: How do Indonesian and English religious education policies differ in the forms of cognitive tolerance they emphasize? The analysis compares four components: Knowledge of Religious Others, Recognition of Internal Diversity, Critical Reflection, and Understanding Commonalities and Differences.

Literature Review

Indonesia and England provide different contexts for examining these questions. Indonesian religious education is predominantly organized through a monoreligious structure in which students receive instruction according to their own religion. Recent Indonesian scholarship shows that tolerance education does not develop through one fixed process. Mulya and Aditomo demonstrate that students may construct tolerance through different discourses, including nationalism, tolerant theological ideas, and interpersonal relationships. Their work shows that tolerance is interpreted through existing religious and social frameworks rather than simply transmitted from curriculum to student.⁴ Mulya, Aditomo, and Suryani similarly identify several discourses through which Muslim pre-service teachers construct tolerant religious identities. These include spiritual interpretations of Islam, awareness of religious plurality, and concern about conservative and radical movements.⁵ These studies suggest that religious commitment and tolerance are not necessarily opposites. Instead, the forms of knowledge and interpretation available to students shape how the relationship between them is understood.

⁴ Teguh Wijaya Mulya and Anindito Aditomo, "Researching religious tolerance education using discourse analysis: a case study from Indonesia," *British Journal of Religious Education* 41, no. 4 (2019): 446–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2018.1556602>.

⁵ Teguh Wijaya Mulya, Anindito Aditomo, and Anne Suryani, "On being a religiously tolerant Muslim: discursive contestations among pre-service teachers in contemporary Indonesia," *British Journal of Religious Education* 44, no. 1 (2022): 66–79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1917338>.

Mu'ti develops this argument by proposing a pluralistic model of Islamic religious education in which students remain committed to their own religious convictions while learning to understand and engage with those who hold different views. He emphasizes internal diversity and critical thinking, along with dialogue and the examination of religious questions from multiple perspectives.⁶ This proposal is significant because it does not require the abandonment of religion-specific education. It demonstrates how cognitive openness can be developed from within a confessional or monoreligious framework.

Other current empirical research identifies important limitations in Indonesian tolerance education. Sirry et al. found that teachers commonly support peaceful coexistence and describe tolerance positively but often lack the interreligious orientation and religious literacy needed to teach it effectively. Their findings raise questions about whether general messages of respect are sufficient when students have limited opportunities to learn substantively about other traditions. The issue is not simply whether tolerance appears in educational discourse, but whether students receive the knowledge and interpretive tools required to understand the people with whom they are expected to interact.⁷

English scholarship addresses similar concerns through debates about representation, knowledge, and worldviews. Cooling argues that the move toward Religion and Worldviews should not be understood as merely adding more traditions to an already crowded curriculum, but as reframing religious education around the relationship between organized traditions and personal worldviews.⁸ His later work places scholarly and reflexive judgment at the center of a knowledge-rich approach, arguing that students should not only acquire information but also understand how knowledge is interpreted through personal and social frameworks.⁹

The shift responds to the limitations of presenting religions as fixed and internally uniform systems. Salter shows that engagement with faith practitioners can provide personal representations that enrich generalized descriptions of religious traditions.¹⁰ Franzén Johnson, Lilja, and Osbeck likewise demonstrate that students encounter several discourses about religion. Religion may be viewed as threatening or outdated, but it may also be understood as meaningful, flexible, or a source of security. Access to a wider range of discourses can enable more nuanced thinking, while narrow classroom representations may reinforce othering and prejudice.¹¹

However, the inclusion of worldviews does not automatically produce accurate or

⁶ Abdul Mu'ti, "Pluralistic Islamic Religious Education: A Vision for Indonesia," *Review of Faith & International Affairs* 21, no. 2 (2023): 121–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2023.2200280>.

⁷ Sirry et al., "Teachers' perspectives," 505–19.

⁸ Trevor Cooling, "Worldview in religious education: autobiographical reflections on The Commission on Religious Education in England final report," *British Journal of Religious Education* 42, no. 4 (2020): 403–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1764497>.

⁹ Trevor Cooling, "Knowledge in a religion and worldviews approach in English schools," *British Journal of Religious Education* 47, no. 2 (2025): 130–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2304693>.

¹⁰ Emma Salter, "Welcome to my church: faith-practitioners and the representation of religious traditions in secular RE," *Journal of Religious Education* 68 (2020): 289–303, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-020-00122-6>.

¹¹ Anna Franzén Johnson, Annika Lilja, and Christina Osbeck, "Discourses on religion in research that focuses on students' perspectives," *Journal of Religious Education* 72 (2024): 235–53, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-024-00230-7>.

complex understanding. Christopher and Revell found that teachers working with a Religion and Worldviews approach to Islam sometimes remained constrained by overly standardized ideas about what counted as legitimate knowledge. Teachers could recognize the value of lived diversity while still feeling that only simplified beliefs, practices, and institutional forms were appropriate for the classroom.¹² Flanagan adds that teachers' personal worldviews may consciously or unconsciously influence the content they select and the way they represent religious knowledge.¹³ Curricular reform therefore depends on more than new terminology. It also requires teacher knowledge, self-awareness, and interpretive judgment.

Critical Reflection presents another challenge because it may be interpreted as hostility toward religion or as an attempt to weaken religious commitment. Jarmer, however, distinguishes critical thinking from the simple rejection of religion. His research connects critical thinking with accurate description and scholarly distinction. It also includes reflection on the social effects of beliefs and practices and the development of reasoned judgment.¹⁴ This distinction supports the present study because critical reflection is one of the four cognitive components examined in the policy documents. It can support cognitive tolerance by challenging stereotypes, examining sources, and recognizing religious complexity without assuming that religious truth claims must be dismissed.

Taken together, this scholarship demonstrates growing attention to the quality of religious knowledge, internal diversity, representation, and critical engagement in religious education. It also shows that tolerance cannot be separated from how religious difference is understood and interpreted. However, these cognitive concerns have rarely been examined comparatively at the level of policy and curriculum guidance. Less attention has also been given to their theological significance: how religious education can encourage accurate and fair understanding of religious others while continuing to take religious commitment, truth claims, and disagreement seriously.

Theoretical Framework

Tolerance is often described as a social attitude composed of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions.¹⁵ The cognitive dimension concerns what individuals know, believe, understand, and assume about those who are different from themselves. The affective dimension concerns feelings such as respect, openness, discomfort, or empathy. The behavioral dimension concerns actions such as cooperation, dialogue, inclusion, or discrimination. Although these dimensions are connected, they are not identical. This study focuses specifically on cognitive tolerance because religious education directly

¹² Kate Christopher and Lynn Revell, "Islam as educational knowledge: challenges and barriers to the development of a Religion and Worldviews approach to teaching Islam in schools," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 45, no. 2 (2024): 140-52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2024.2315404>.

¹³ Ruth Flanagan, "Teachers' personal worldviews and RE in England: a way forward?," *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 3 (2021): 320-36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1826404>.

¹⁴ Sebastian Tjelle Jarmer, "Critique of religion and critical thinking in religious education," *British Journal of Religious Education* 47, no. 3 (2025): 253-67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2024.2403400>.

¹⁵ Milton J. Rosenberg and Carl I. Hovland (ed.), "Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Components," in *Attitude Organization and Change: An Analysis of Consistency among Attitude Components* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 1-14.

shapes the knowledge and interpretive frameworks through which students perceive religious difference.

Cognitive tolerance does not require students to agree with the truth claims, practices, or moral positions of another religion or worldview. Rather, it requires that difference be understood accurately and fairly enough that disagreement does not depend on distortion, stereotyping, or ignorance. Learners may remain committed to their own religious positions while recognizing that others hold meaningful beliefs and the right to live according to those commitments. Cognitive tolerance concerns the intellectual conditions under which religious difference can be approached without reducing the religious other to an abstract label, social threat, or simplified doctrinal category.

Cognitive tolerance overlaps with concepts such as religious literacy and Religion and Worldviews, but it is not intended to replace them. Religious literacy contributes to cognitive tolerance by providing the knowledge needed to understand religious beliefs, practices, communities, and their internal diversity. Similarly, approaches associated with Religion and Worldviews can contribute by exposing students to lived religion, multiple perspectives, personal and organized worldviews, and processes of interpretation. These approaches provide important resources through which cognitive tolerance may be developed, but knowledge of religion or participation in a worldview-oriented curriculum does not itself constitute tolerance.

The analytical contribution of cognitive tolerance lies in making the relationship between religious understanding and tolerance itself the object of analysis. Religious literacy can examine the quality and adequacy of knowledge about religion, while Religion and Worldviews provides a broader approach to how religious and non-religious worldviews may be studied. Cognitive tolerance asks a different question: how do particular forms of knowledge and interpretation shape the way religious difference is understood? A student may possess substantial knowledge about another religion while remaining intolerant of its adherents, just as a student may express respect for religious others while understanding them primarily through stereotypes or simplified categories. Knowledge about religion is therefore not itself cognitive tolerance. It becomes relevant to cognitive tolerance insofar as it shapes how religious difference is understood, represented, compared, and judged. This framework makes it possible to compare different educational pathways toward understanding religious difference rather than evaluating curricula only according to how much religious knowledge they provide or which pedagogical model they employ.

Examining how selected religious education policy and curriculum guidance documents shape the concept of cognitive tolerance will provide insight into instilling religious understanding. Religious education policy shapes this foundation by determining what counts as legitimate religious knowledge, which traditions and worldviews are represented, and what forms of understanding students are expected to develop.¹⁶ Religions may be presented as systems of doctrine, sources of moral formation, or personal and social worldviews. These policies also determine whether students are

¹⁶ Adam Dinham et al., *Religion and Belief Literacy: Reconnecting a Chain of Learning* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2021).

asked only to remember information or to interpret and engage with its meaning.

For the purposes of this study, cognitive tolerance is operationalized through four interrelated components derived from scholarship on religious literacy, internal diversity, interpretive religious education, and critical reflection. The first is Knowledge of Religious Others. Religious education should provide substantive knowledge of the beliefs, practices, and lived experiences associated with religions and non-religious worldviews.¹⁷ Without this knowledge, understandings of religious others may be shaped primarily by family assumptions, media portrayals, political discourse, or inherited community prejudice.¹⁸ Religious education can correct such limitations by providing students with more reliable and contextualized information.

The second component is Recognition of Internal Diversity. Religious traditions are not uniform systems.¹⁹ They include different schools of interpretation, regional practices, and levels of personal commitment. Robert Jackson's interpretive approach helps to address this variation. Jackson argues that religions should be represented through the relationship between broad traditions, particular groups, and individual experience. His emphasis on representation challenges curricula that present official doctrine as though it completely describes the beliefs and lives of every adherent. Recognition of Internal Diversity helps prevent students from treating religious labels as complete descriptions of individuals.²⁰

The third component is Critical Reflection. It refers to the ability to interpret religious material, examine sources, compare perspectives, and develop informed responses. It involves more than memorizing information or repeating approved conclusions. It should not be equated with hostility toward religion.²¹ A religious claim may be critically examined while its internal meaning and authority are still taken seriously. Competing interpretations may also be compared without assuming that all are equally convincing. The aim is informed judgment rather than automatic acceptance or rejection.

The fourth component is Understanding Commonalities and Differences. Comparative learning can help students recognize that religions and worldviews often address similar human questions. These may concern morality, suffering, community, meaning, or hope. Identifying common concerns may reduce social distance and help students see religious others as participants in shared human life. At the same time, comparison must preserve meaningful difference. If commonality is overemphasized, religions may be presented as though they teach essentially the same thing in different forms.²² If difference is emphasized without context or common ground, students may

¹⁷ Kate E. Soules and Sabrina Jafralie, "Religious Literacy in Teacher Education," *Religion & Education* 48, no. 1 (2021): 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15507394.2021.1876497>; Hannam et al., "Religious literacy," 214–26.

¹⁸ Anne Suryani and A. Bukhori Muslim, *Embracing Diversity: Preparing Future Teachers to Foster Religious Tolerance* (Singapore: Springer, 2024), 51–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-1616-6>.

¹⁹ Dinham et al., *Religion and Belief Literacy*; Suyanto et al., "Problems of religious literacy," 165–81.

²⁰ Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: An Interpretive Approach* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 47–50; Robert Jackson, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality: Issues in Diversity and Pedagogy* (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 87–108.

²¹ Jarmer, "Critique of religion and critical thinking," 258–63.

²² Hannam et al., "Religious literacy," 214–26; Dinham, *Religion and Belief Literacy*.

view religious communities as fundamentally separate or opposed. The four components are interdependent, and no single component represents cognitive tolerance on its own. Together, the four components provide a framework for examining how religious education policies structure religious understanding.

Research Method

This study employs qualitative document analysis and comparative policy analysis to examine the forms of cognitive tolerance emphasized within religious education policy in Indonesia and England. These methods were selected because the purpose of the study is not to measure student attitudes or classroom outcomes. Instead, it interprets how official policy and curriculum guidance documents frame religious knowledge, religious diversity, comparison, and critical reflection. Descriptive coding frequencies support this qualitative interpretation by showing how cognitive attention is distributed among recurring themes within each policy corpus.

The policy corpus was selected purposively. The Indonesian corpus consists of Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Instruction which establishes the legal and institutional structure of religious education; Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024, which sets out the broader framework of “*Kurikulum Merdeka*”; and Kepka BSKAP No. 046/H/KR/2025, which provides the subject-specific learning outcomes.²³ Together, these documents represent different operational levels of Indonesian religious education policy.

The English corpus consists of the National Content Standard for Religious Education in England (2023) and the Tower Hamlets Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2022–2027.²⁴ The National Content Standard is a non-statutory national guidance document representing the contemporary Religion and Worldviews approach. The Tower Hamlets syllabus provides one example of the locally determined curriculum through which religious education is implemented. The two documents therefore represent national professional guidance and local curricular implementation.

This asymmetry also reflects differences in how religious education is governed and implemented in the two countries and in the types of policy and curricular documents made publicly available. The two corpora therefore cannot be constructed from documents with completely equivalent functions. Rather than treating the documents as

²³ Republic of Indonesia, *Peraturan Pemerintah No. 55 Tahun 2007 tentang Pendidikan Agama dan Pendidikan Keagamaan* [Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Instruction] (Jakarta, 2007); Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Republic of Indonesia, *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 12 Tahun 2024 tentang Kurikulum pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar, dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah* [Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 12 of 2024 concerning the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education] (Jakarta, 2024); Board of Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Republic of Indonesia, *Keputusan Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Nomor 046/H/KR/2025 tentang Capaian Pembelajaran pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar, dan Jenjang Pendidikan Menengah* [Decision of the Head of the Board of Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Number 046/H/KR/2025 concerning Learning Outcomes for Early Childhood Education, Basic Education, and Secondary Education] (Jakarta, 2025).

²⁴ Religious Education Council of England and Wales, *National Content Standard for Religious Education in England (First Edition)* (London: Religious Education Council of England and Wales, 2023); Tower Hamlets Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education, *Tower Hamlets Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2022–2027*.

directly interchangeable units, the comparison examines how religious education is framed across the relevant legal, curricular, and pedagogical structures available within each national context.

Data collection involved repeated reading of the selected documents to identify passages related to students' knowledge and understanding of religious difference. The analysis was not restricted to direct uses of terms such as "tolerance," "pluralism," or "harmony." Passages were also included when they described knowledge of religions and worldviews, representation of diversity within traditions, comparison of perspectives, interpretation of religious material, or critical reflection. Each coding record contained a passage expressing a relevant policy or curricular idea. Most records consisted of a single sentence, although in some instances related sentences were kept together when necessary to preserve their meaning and context. Each record included the document source, location, assigned parent category and subcode or subcodes, and an assessment of its strength of relevance.

The cognitive dataset was drawn from a larger coding study that initially organized relevant passages under four parent categories: Cognitive Tolerance, Affective Tolerance, Behavioral Tolerance, and Structural/Policy Guidelines. All coding was conducted by the author using a set of definitions established for each category and subcode. Each coding assignment was also rated as having strong, moderate, or weak relevance according to how clearly the passage reflected the assigned category. When the relevance of a code was unclear, the passage was reconsidered according to the category definition and its surrounding context. Weak assignments that did not clearly meet the definition were not included in the final quantitative summaries. The coding results were manually reviewed a second time check the consistency of the assignments and reconsider unclear cases. For the present article, only the retained records coded under Cognitive Tolerance were extracted and reanalyzed. The other parent categories are not included in the comparative findings.

For the present study, records assigned to Cognitive Tolerance were reanalyzed using the four components established in the theoretical framework. Knowledge of Religious Others identified passages that encouraged substantive understanding of religious or non-religious traditions, communities, beliefs, practices, or experiences. Recognition of Internal Diversity identified passages that acknowledged variation within traditions, including differing interpretations, practices, identities, or levels of commitment. Critical Reflection included expectations that students interpret material, evaluate claims or sources, consider multiple perspectives, examine assumptions, or develop informed responses. Understanding Commonalities and Differences identified passages that encouraged comparison among religions and worldviews, including both shared concerns and meaningful distinctions. The same definitions were applied to both national datasets. The four cognitive subcodes were not mutually exclusive, so a passage could receive more than one subcode when it clearly reflected more than one component.

The Indonesian and English datasets differed substantially in size and in the types of documents they contained. Raw coding frequencies were therefore not treated as directly comparable between the two countries. Instead, the quantitative summary shows the relative distribution of the four cognitive subcodes within each national dataset. After manual review, the Indonesian dataset contained 48 cognitive records and the English

dataset contained 177. Because a single record could receive more than one cognitive subcode, the 48 Indonesian records produced 94 cognitive subcode assignments, while the 177 English records produced 340. For each country, the total number of cognitive subcode assignments was treated as 100% and the relative frequency of each subcode was calculated as follows:

$$\text{Subcode percentage} = \text{Number of assignments for the subcode} \div \text{Total cognitive subcode assignments for the country} \times 100$$

For example, Understanding Commonalities and Differences received 33 assignments in the Indonesian dataset resulting in $33/94 \approx 35\%$. Critical Reflection received 120 assignments in the English dataset, resulting in $120/340 \approx 35\%$. These percentages show the relative emphasis given to each cognitive component within the selected documents. They do not indicate how frequently these themes appear across the national education systems as a whole. Percentages are reported to two significant figures to reflect their descriptive use and to avoid implying a level of quantitative precision beyond the qualitative coding design.

The numerical results are used descriptively rather than as independent measures of policy quality or educational effectiveness. Coding frequency indicates how cognitive themes are distributed within the selected documents, but it does not demonstrate that those themes are implemented consistently in classrooms or produce particular student outcomes. The cognitive datasets also differ substantially in size, with more retained records and subcode assignments in the English documents. The documents differ in function as well. The Indonesian corpus includes a government regulation with a substantial legal and administrative orientation, while the English documents are more explicitly curricular and pedagogical. In addition, the Tower Hamlets syllabus represents one local English context rather than every agreed syllabus in England. The findings must therefore be interpreted through close reading of the policy language and curricular context, not through percentages alone. They identify the cognitive opportunities and emphases embedded in selected policy documents rather than causal differences in student understanding or tolerance.

Results

Distribution of Cognitive Tolerance

The comparison examines the internal distribution of the four cognitive components within each policy corpus. The Indonesian dataset contains 48 retained cognitive records with 94 subcode assignments, while the English dataset contains 177 records with 340 assignments.

The Indonesian corpus places its strongest emphasis on Understanding Commonalities and Differences, which accounts for 35% of cognitive assignments. Critical Reflection represents 26%, Recognition of Internal Diversity 21%, and Knowledge of Religious Others 18%. This pattern suggests that Indonesian policy most often approaches cognitive tolerance by helping students understand religious difference in relation to shared values and social responsibility. It also connects this understanding with national unity and peaceful coexistence. Religious diversity is interpreted from

within religion-specific instruction and the broader framework of “*Pancasila*” character formation.

Knowledge of Religious Others is present in the Indonesian documents, but it is less prominent than the other cognitive components. Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 organizes religious education according to the religion professed by each student, while “*Kurikulum Merdeka*” and the BSKAP learning outcomes connect religious formation with critical reasoning, religious moderation, diversity, and harmonious life in a plural society. The curriculum encourages understanding of difference, but generally from within the student’s own religious tradition rather than through the shared study of multiple religions and worldviews.

The English documents display a different distribution. Critical Reflection is the largest cognitive component at 35%, followed by Knowledge of Religious Others at 29%. Recognition of Internal Diversity accounts for 20%, while Understanding Commonalities and Differences represents 15%. This pattern places greater emphasis on enquiry, interpretation, evaluation, and substantive knowledge of religious and non-religious worldviews. The National Content Standard for Religious Education in England and the Tower Hamlets agreed syllabus expect students to examine how worldviews are expressed, interpreted, contested, and lived, as well as to develop informed responses of their own.

Understanding Commonalities and Differences occupies more than twice the proportion of the Indonesian dataset that it does in the English dataset. By contrast, Critical Reflection and Knowledge of Religious Others together account for 65% of English assignments, compared with 44% in Indonesia. This reflects Indonesia’s relative attention to shared social life and England’s greater attention to knowledge and interpretation.

Recognition of Internal Diversity is the most proportionally similar component, accounting for 21% of Indonesian assignments and 20% of English assignments. This similarity indicates that the principal difference between the two corpora is not simply whether diversity within religious traditions is acknowledged. The distinction lies in how that diversity is educationally situated. In Indonesia, internal diversity is usually considered within separate religion-specific curricula. In England, it is more often examined through the shared study of organized, lived, and personal worldviews.

Knowledge of Religious Others and Recognition of Internal Diversity

Knowledge of Religious Others and Recognition of Internal Diversity are closely related because knowledge of another religion can remain shallow or misleading when the tradition is presented as uniform. Knowledge of Religious Others accounts for 18% of the Indonesian cognitive assignments and 29% of the English assignments. The English corpus therefore gives greater relative attention to the substantive study of religious and non-religious perspectives. In the Indonesian documents, Knowledge of Religious Others is present, but it is usually framed indirectly through religious moderation, social harmony, respect for diversity, and responsible life within a plural society. The central legal structure remains religion-specific. Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 establishes that students receive religious education according to the religion they profess and are taught by an educator of the same religion. As a result, the primary object of

study is the student's own religious tradition.

Other religions are not completely absent from Indonesian policy. "*Kurikulum Merdeka*" includes global diversity, critical reasoning, cooperation, and "*Pancasila*" character among its broader educational aims. The BSKAP learning outcomes also include references to tolerance, religious moderation, plural society, respect, and peaceful relations across religious difference. Some outcomes expect students to recognize diversity, reject prejudice, and apply religious principles responsibly within a heterogeneous society. Knowledge of Religious Others appears as part of the social and moral environment in which students are expected to practice their own religion. However, the documents generally do not organize other religions and worldviews as a shared field of systematic study. Indonesian policy more often teaches how students should respond to religious difference than what members of other traditions believe or how they practice their faith. Knowledge of others is connected to moral orientation and social responsibility, but it is less frequently developed through detailed comparative content. The Indonesian corpus tends to position the religious other as a neighbor, fellow citizen, or member of a plural community rather than as the direct object of sustained curricular enquiry.

The English documents take a different approach. The National Content Standard for Religious Education in England and the Tower Hamlets agreed syllabus place knowledge of religious and non-religious worldviews near the center of the subject. Pupils are expected to study how worldviews shape beliefs, practices, identity, community, moral commitments, and responses to significant human questions. The curriculum includes Christianity, other principal religions, non-religious worldviews, and perspectives that may not fit neatly within institutional categories. The English policies also expand the meaning of religious knowledge beyond formal doctrine. The Tower Hamlets syllabus distinguishes between organized and personal worldviews, while the National Content Standard emphasizes the ways worldviews are lived, interpreted, and debated. Students are expected to understand not only the official teachings of a tradition, but also how individuals and communities express them differently. Religious knowledge is presented as dynamic and connected to lived experience rather than as a list of fixed beliefs and practices.

Recognition of Internal Diversity accounts for 21% of Indonesian assignments and 20% of English assignments. This near-equal proportion complicates any simple conclusion that English policy recognizes internal diversity while Indonesian policy does not. In the Indonesian corpus, internal diversity appears primarily within the separate religious curricula. The BSKAP learning outcomes cover multiple religion-specific subjects and include differing forms of religious knowledge, practice, ethical application, and community life. Variation is acknowledged, but usually from within the boundaries of a particular religious tradition. The curriculum may recognize differences in practice, interpretation, social setting, or religious expression without placing those differences into direct comparison with other traditions.

In the English corpus, internal diversity is more explicitly connected to the concepts of lived, organized, and personal worldviews. Pupils are encouraged to understand that members of the same religion may interpret beliefs differently, practice in different ways, or relate to their tradition with different levels of commitment. Internal diversity becomes

part of shared classroom enquiry and helps prevent religions from being represented as uniform or static entities. The nearly equal proportions conceal an important contextual difference. Indonesia tends to recognize internal diversity within religion-specific formation, while England more often treats it as part of shared comparative study.

Critical Reflection and Understanding Commonalities and Differences

Critical Reflection accounts for 26% of Indonesian cognitive assignments and 35% of English assignments, while Understanding Commonalities and Differences represents 35% in Indonesia and 15% in England. The two corpora therefore place their strongest cognitive emphasis in different areas.

Critical Reflection is present in "*Kurikulum Merdeka*" and the BSKAP learning outcomes. Students are expected to reason critically, reflect on religious teaching, apply moral principles, and respond to social problems within their religious commitments and "*Pancasila*" values. This reflection usually takes place within a religion-specific structure and is directed toward personal conduct and social responsibility in a plural society.

Indonesian Critical Reflection therefore takes on a primarily formative and applied character. Learners consider religious teachings, evaluate situations, and connect belief with moral action. Critical reasoning is often directed toward becoming a responsible religious person and citizen rather than toward sustained comparison among multiple religious and non-religious perspectives. Reflection serves the interpretation and application of one's own tradition within a diverse social setting. The English documents assign a larger relative share to critical reflection. The Tower Hamlets syllabus defines religious education through systematic enquiry into significant human questions and expects pupils to appreciate and appraise varied responses before developing responses of their own. The National Content Standard for Religious Education in England likewise describes worldviews as a dynamic field of debate involving interpretation and judgment within and between religious and non-religious communities. English policy expects students to examine sources, compare perspectives, and reflect on how their own developing worldview relates to those of others.

Critical Reflection functions as a central mode of learning within the English documents. It is not limited to the application of inherited beliefs. It includes interpreting multiple perspectives, assessing competing responses, and making informed judgments. This does not imply hostility toward religion or the rejection of religious commitment. Rather, it positions students as participants in an intellectual process through which religious and non-religious claims are examined, compared, and understood. The opposite pattern appears in Understanding Commonalities and Differences. This subcode is the largest cognitive category in the Indonesian corpus, accounting for 35% of assignments. Indonesian policy repeatedly places religious diversity within the wider framework of "*Pancasila*," national unity, harmony, moderation, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence. Indonesian policy expects recognition of difference alongside the shared responsibilities that support common social life.

Within this framework, comparison serves a strongly social purpose. Religious difference is not approached only as an intellectual subject, but as a condition of national life that students must learn to navigate responsibly. The emphasis on commonalities and differences helps connect religious identity with citizenship, social harmony, and the

expectation that people from different traditions can live together without abandoning their own beliefs. Cognitive tolerance is oriented toward locating difference within a shared moral and national order.

Discussion

Cognitive tolerance is not organized in the same way within the Indonesian and English policy documents. Both sets of documents contain all four cognitive components, but they differ in the relative emphasis given to them and in the ways those components are connected within the curriculum. Indonesian policy gives its strongest cognitive attention to Understanding Commonalities and Differences, while English policy gives greater attention to Critical Reflection and knowledge of religious and non-religious worldviews. These dominant patterns remain important but they should not be treated as mutually exclusive models. The less prominent components reveal internal tensions and overlaps that complicate a simple contrast between religious formation and critical enquiry.

Understanding through Commonality and Religious Formation

The Indonesian configuration approaches cognitive tolerance primarily through religious formation, “*Pancasila*” values, and shared social responsibility. Rather than treating tolerance primarily as the academic study of multiple religions, it connects religious understanding with moral character, citizenship, and peaceful life in a plural society. Students are expected to deepen their knowledge of their own religion while recognizing the legitimacy of religious difference.

The strength of this approach lies in its recognition that religious identity can support, rather than oppose, tolerance. Raihani similarly argues that commitment to one’s own tradition can coexist with respect for others and cooperation across religious boundaries.²⁵ Religious education is therefore not limited to the external observation of beliefs and practices. It presents religion as a source of identity, obligation, and social responsibility. When faithfulness is connected with respect and responsibility toward others, this model can provide a meaningful foundation for tolerance.

The presence of Critical Reflection as 26% of the Indonesian cognitive assignments complicates any interpretation of this configuration as simply emphasizing harmony and commonality. Critical reflection is not absent from religion-specific education; rather, it is frequently incorporated into religious formation. The Indonesian documents connect reflection with questions of religious interpretation, differences of opinion, moderation, and responsible life within a plural society. Critical enquiry therefore often works from within a religious framework rather than standing outside it as a detached comparison of traditions. This suggests that religious formation and critical reflection should not be treated as opposing educational processes.

Knowledge of Religious Others is less prominent in the Indonesian dataset, but it is not absent. The curriculum includes opportunities for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, attention to the experiences of adherents of other religions, and, in some contexts, engagement with religious difference beyond the student’s own tradition. These

²⁵ Raihani, “Creating a Culture of Religious Tolerance in an Indonesian School,” *South East Asia Research* 22, no. 4 (2014): 541–60, <https://doi.org/10.5367/sear.2014.0234>.

elements show that the monoreligious structure is not cognitively closed. Its limitation is instead that knowledge of other traditions may remain comparatively less central and more indirect. Because students learn primarily within their own religious curriculum, their understanding of religious others may depend on how those traditions are represented from within their own faith. Messages of moderation and harmony do not necessarily provide detailed knowledge of how members of other religions understand themselves.²⁶ Sirry et al. raise a similar concern, showing that support for peaceful coexistence may remain limited when teachers and students have few structured opportunities for interreligious learning.²⁷ General appeals to harmony cannot by themselves correct stereotypes or incomplete representations.

Understanding through Knowledge and Critical Enquiry

The English configuration places greater emphasis on substantive knowledge and critical enquiry. Religions and worldviews are presented as fields of study that students are expected to investigate and interpret. Contemporary Religion and Worldviews frameworks also seek to move beyond fixed descriptions of doctrine by giving greater attention to organized, lived, and personal worldviews. Cooling argues that this approach should help students understand not only what people believe, but how worldviews shape meaning and action.²⁸

Its main strength is that students gain direct curricular access to a wider range of religious and non-religious perspectives. Critical reflection encourages them to examine sources, distinguish among interpretations, and develop informed judgments. Jarmer makes an important distinction here between critical thinking about religion and hostility toward religious belief.²⁹ Properly applied, this approach can challenge inherited stereotypes and help students understand religious diversity as complex and internally varied.

At the same time, the English pattern should not be reduced to critical enquiry alone. Understanding Commonalities and Differences accounts for 15% of its cognitive assignments and frequently operates through the enquiry process itself. Students compare religious and non-religious responses to questions of meaning, purpose, morality, identity, peace, conflict, and the good life. Comparison therefore remains part of the English configuration, but it is commonly used as a means of investigating and interpreting multiple perspectives rather than primarily establishing a basis for social harmony. Critical enquiry and comparative understanding are thus intertwined rather than competing elements.

The English emphasis on enquiry also does not exclude formative or normative aims. The Tower Hamlets syllabus asks students to investigate significant human questions and varied responses before developing responses of their own, while the National Content Standard expects students to reflect on how their own developing

²⁶ Suyanto et al., "Problems of religious literacy," 165–81; Sirry et al., "Teachers' perspectives," 505–19.

²⁷ Sirry et al., "Teachers' perspectives," 505–19.

²⁸ Cooling, "Worldview in religious education," 403–14; Cooling, "Knowledge in a religion and worldviews approach," 130–39.

²⁹ Jarmer, "Critique of Religion and Critical Thinking," 258–63.

worldview relates to those of others. Formation therefore appears differently from the Indonesian religion-specific model: it is not primarily directed toward deepening commitment within a single tradition, but toward helping students examine their own values, judgments, and developing worldview in relation to religious and non-religious perspectives. Critical enquiry in the English documents can thus have a formative dimension even when it is organized through shared study rather than confessional instruction.

Its effectiveness, however, depends heavily on the quality of teaching and representation. A broad curriculum may still present traditions superficially if teachers lack sufficient subject knowledge or interpretive skill. Salter shows how engagement with faith practitioners can enrich representation, while Flanagan demonstrates that teachers' own worldviews can influence the knowledge they select and present.³⁰ The English model may also risk treating religion mainly as academic or civic content. When religion becomes primarily an object of enquiry, less attention may be given to its internal authority, truth claims, and formative importance for believers. A worldview-based approach must therefore balance openness and critical enquiry with serious attention to religious commitment.

Internal Diversity: Similar Proportions, Overlapping Functions

The near-equal proportions assigned to Recognition of Internal Diversity are one of the clearest areas of overlap between the two datasets. Indonesia records 21% and England 20%. This similarity challenges any simple assumption that Recognition of Internal Diversity belongs primarily to multireligious religious education and further demonstrates that the two configurations are not opposites. Both systems recognize variation within religious traditions, although they tend to place that recognition within different curricular relationships.

In Indonesia, internal diversity is generally encountered within religion-specific instruction, where differences in practice, interpretation, ethics, or community life can deepen understanding of the student's own religious community. Yet this inward orientation can also extend outward: some passages connect differences within traditions with moderation, solidarity, and relations across religious boundaries. In England, internal diversity is more consistently used across several religions and worldviews to challenge broad generalizations and to distinguish between organized traditions and the ways beliefs are interpreted and lived by individuals and communities. The functions therefore overlap as well as differ. In both settings, recognition of internal diversity can resist overly simple representations of religion, but the English documents make this representational purpose more explicit and systematic. Jackson's interpretive approach is especially relevant here because it emphasizes that adequate representation requires attention to the relationship between traditions, groups, and individuals.

Theological and Ethical Implications of Cognitive Tolerance

The findings also raise important theological questions about the relationship between religious commitment and tolerance. Religious traditions make claims about truth,

³⁰ Salter, "Welcome to my church," 296–99; Flanagan, "Teachers' personal worldviews," 328–32.

authority, and the nature of human life that cannot always be reconciled with those of other traditions. Tolerance therefore cannot depend on the assumption that religious differences are insignificant or that all religious claims are equally valid. Cognitive tolerance offers a way of distinguishing theological disagreement from misunderstanding or misrepresentation. A student may remain convinced of the truth of their own religious beliefs while developing an accurate understanding of beliefs they reject. This distinction is particularly relevant to confessional religious education, where commitment to a religious tradition is an explicit educational goal. The Indonesian findings suggest that religious formation and critical reflection can operate together, although the quality of students' understanding of religious others depends on how those traditions are represented. The theological significance of cognitive tolerance is therefore not that it weakens religious conviction, but that it challenges the assumption that strong conviction requires a limited or distorted understanding of others.

This distinction also has implications for the social responsibilities of religious communities. Religious education does more than communicate information about beliefs and practices; it shapes how students understand their relationship with people outside their own tradition. From a theological and ethical perspective, the representation of religious others is therefore not simply a matter of educational accuracy. It also concerns whether religious communities approach those with whom they disagree fairly and responsibly. The four components of cognitive tolerance provide a framework for examining this responsibility. Knowledge of Religious Others and Recognition of Internal Diversity challenge simplified representations, while Critical Reflection and Understanding Commonalities and Differences encourage students to consider how they interpret and evaluate religious difference. The comparison between Indonesia and England demonstrates that these responsibilities can be addressed through different educational structures without requiring the abandonment of religious commitment. For religious educators and policymakers, the question is not only whether students are encouraged to respect others, but whether the religious understanding they develop provides a sound basis for that respect.

Implications for Indonesian Religious Education

The findings do not dictate that Indonesia should abandon religion-specific instruction. Cognitive tolerance could be strengthened within the present structure by expanding the quality and range of knowledge students receive about religious others. This could include more accurate descriptions of other traditions, examples of lived religion, and opportunities to examine how adherents explain their own beliefs and practices.

Comparative learning could be designed more carefully by examining how different traditions respond to common ethical or social questions while still recognizing important differences in doctrine and practice. Reflective questions could encourage students to examine stereotypes, distinguish between official teaching and lived experience, and consider how their own standpoint influences their interpretation of others.

These additions would not require teachers to present all religious claims as equally true. Cognitive tolerance concerns accurate understanding and fair interpretation, not theological agreement. A religion-specific curriculum can maintain confessional

commitments while giving students more reliable intellectual resources for understanding those outside their own tradition.

Conclusion

The study shows that Indonesian and English religious education policies emphasize different configurations of cognitive tolerance. Indonesian policy gives its strongest relative emphasis to Understanding Commonalities and Differences within religion-specific formation, social harmony, and responsible citizenship. English policy gives greater emphasis to Critical Reflection and Knowledge of Religious Others through shared study of religious and non-religious worldviews. These patterns are not mutually exclusive. Critical reflection also operates within Indonesian religious formation, while English enquiry includes formative aims. Recognition of Internal Diversity is nearly equal in both datasets. The main difference lies in the relative prominence of the four cognitive components.

The findings do not show that one system produces more tolerant students than the other. The analysis concerns selected policy documents, not classroom implementation or student outcomes, and the two corpora differ in size and function. The comparison instead shows that policies can promote tolerance through different combinations of knowledge, reflection, comparison, and recognition of diversity.

In Indonesia, cognitive tolerance could be strengthened without abandoning religion-specific instruction. More accurate knowledge of religious others, attention to lived and internal diversity, and critical reflection on stereotypes could provide stronger resources for understanding religious difference. These changes do not require theological agreement or weaker religious commitment. More broadly, cognitive tolerance shows that religious commitment and disagreement can coexist with accurate and fair understanding of religious others.

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