# Addressing multicultural societies: lessons from religious education curriculum policy in Indonesia and England

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# Addressing multicultural societies: lessons from religious education curriculum policy in Indonesia and England

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**Abstract** This study compares the religious education (RE) curriculum policy in England and Indonesia focusing on state schools. It explores political, socio-cultural and religious principles informing the curricula, and investigates topical issues within the particular type of RE being promoted. The learning and teaching strategies employed to engage students with the curriculum are also discussed. We assert that multicultural and critical approaches need to be employed in educating pupils, in order to raise awareness of their responsibility to work toward more harmonious and prosperous societies. In practice, the writing uses content analysis by investigating policy documents issued by various government agencies. It is demonstrated that both countries politically support RE as a subject projected to build up social cohesion. In terms of religious principles, RE in England includes multiple religions and even non-religions such as Humanism in the curriculum, while RE in Indonesia has a mono-religious focus. RE in Indonesia only teaches pupils about their own faith and religious identity, whereas RE in England offers information about various religious and non-religious philosophies or life-orientations. In brief, RE in England employs religious and non-religious exploration to build a broad knowledge of many religions, while RE in Indonesia tends to endorse religious judgment and commitment. This suggests that Indonesia and England have divergent views regarding the multi-cultural understand that is constructed by the two curricula. The multicultural and critical approaches discussed in the study are offered as tools to develop strategies to improve RE curricula so as to produce students with greater religious and cultural competence.

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## 1 Introduction

As multicultural societies, England and Indonesia are generally complex in terms of religious diversity, each with some specific characteristics. Statistically, the English and Welsh 2011 Census reported 59.3% Christians, 4.8% Muslims, 1.5% Hindus, 0.8% Sikhs, 0.5% Jews, 0.4% Buddists, 0.4% spiritualists and 25.1% of the population stating that they have no religion (Office for National Statistics 2011). The updated survey shows that the level of no religious affiliation in England and Wales increased to 49% (NatCen Social Research 2015), a trend that is found in other developed countries, including Australia and the United States (Cusack 2015). Qualitatively speaking, Wolffe (1994, p. 251) has noted that the UK now comprises a wide range of 'people each loyal to their own particular religions', 'non-religious commitment', and 'no deep commitment of any kind'. In addition, *de jure*, Britain is a Christian state with an established church, but in reality secularism tends to be widely accepted (Wright 2004). Arthur, Harding and Godfrey (2009) also found that many white British students seem only to recognize religious values as 'an identity marker', not 'as a moral compass'. Meanwhile, Indonesia has 87.2% Muslims, 6.9% Protestant Christians, 2.9% Catholic Christians, 1.7% Hindus, and other smaller groups of believers (BPS 2010) such as Buddhists, Confucians, and others. In reality, Indonesian society is more fragmented than these figures would suggest. There are also less-committed Muslims with regard to particular religious rituals (Mukhtarom 1998) and other local beliefs that are not covered by official religious classifications. Therefore, while both countries generally include religious education (RE) in their public school curricula, Indonesia's state school curriculum accommodates only the six official religions, whereas England's curriculum, while covering the world religions, also includes modules on Philosophy of Religion and Ethics.

Given these differences, the work of Saerozi (2004) and Zuhdy (2005) indicates that historically, RE in Indonesia has longer been driven by confessional motives, since it teaches students to be loyal and pious within the framework of their own faith. Yet they note that such a confessional or mono-theological perspective does take account of the fact of religious variety, in order for pupils to realize and engage in the modern plural society of Indonesia. In an historical analysis, Saerozi (2004) also found that it was typical of former colonial states to segregate major and minor religions, as well as reducing dialogical contacts amongst different religious adherents, because cooperation between religiously different people could threaten the political interests of colonial administrations. This means that religious segregation potentially retains colonial bias. Meanwhile, Hobson and Edwards (1999) explain that since 'widespread post-war immigration' in the 1940s, Britain has practiced multi-faith teaching in schools. Even if confessional approaches are still accepted, non-confessional approaches such as philosophy and sociology have had greater impact on the presentation of religious history, doctrines and practices (Brown 2016). These non-confessional modes of teaching are considered as being purely informative, and not doctrinal. Given these factors, it can be argued that the possible dominant challenge of RE in Indonesia is religious fanaticism, even radicalization, because of the possible absence of awareness of multi-religious perspectives, while in England the challenge is that teaching 'about' religion from an outsider standpoint reduces the importance of or even ignores the faith-based dimensions of 'conventional' religious doctrines. There is some evidence to suggest that religious conflicts in Indonesia have often occurred, while atheism and anti-religious practices in the UK tend to be dominant, which reinforces that impression.

There has been debate about RE teaching methods, too. Some scholars argue that within a multi-religious society, RE should not use a one-sided 'confessional' or 'indoctrinatory' perspective (Barnes and Wright 2006; Wright 2003; Kassem and Murphy 2009), since it has potential to produce close-minded students. One older non-doctrinal approach that is proposed is phenomenology, which emphasizes the exploration and understanding of religious 'phenomena' such as rituals, events, symbols and arts (School Council 1971). In addition, De Velasco (2007) proposes 'a multi-religious model' enabling students with various religions can share their values and build social harmony (Zuhdy 2005; Baidhawy 2007). In contrast, Ashraf (1986) cited in Wolffe (1994) argues that although sharing human basic values is important, the philosophical approach can lead students to doubt their own beliefs. The anxiety is that religious faith could be eroded since RE is an informatory 'academic exercise' (Schools Council 1971) that does not aim at belief consolidation. However, Franck (2015) has claimed that critical RE can analyse truth-claims of religious doctrines, enabling students from faith traditions to form 'a more compound or complex picture of what it means to claim that this or that belief, religious or non-religious, is true' (p. 237). It is obvious that the non-confessional supporters tend to accentuate the need for RE to adapt to the demands of societal diversity, while the confessional supporters emphasize RE as a tool for strengthening their own unique belief system. Therefore, this first task of this article is to address the multicultural understanding that is constructed through aspects of the RE curricula in Indonesia and England, respectively.

The multicultural and critical perspectives are here used to analyse the existing RE curricula from England and Indonesia. It is likely that there will be significant differences, as Braten (2015) found, between English and Norwegian RE, two European countries with closer historical and religious profiles. In terms of data analysed, we investigate the curriculum policy documents issued at the national and local level by governmental bodies. In England, the documents issued by the Department for Education (DfE), Department of Children, Schools and Families, locally Agreed Syllabi Conferences (ASCs) are the primary sources. Meanwhile in Indonesia, the documents analysed consist of those from the Central Government, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the National Agency for Education Standards (NAES). The MoNE has stated that there are two curricula that have been nationally implemented, that is, the 2006 Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum (The Regulation of MoNE number 160 Year 2014). This article focuses on the 2006 Curriculum, as the 2013 curriculum has to date been piloted only in a small number of schools. The method employed is a content analysis of the RE curriculum documents.

This article is in three parts. The first highlights key concepts within Religious Education (RE), and in multicultural and critical approaches. The second discusses RE curriculum policy in England and Indonesia. This part covers basic principles, main issues and challenges, and teaching and learning strategies. The third part assesses the relevance of RE curriculum policy to multicultural issues, and scopes possible improvement of RE curricula in both countries.

## 2 Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Religious education (RE)

The term 'religious education' in the context of English schooling has been officially used since the 1990s. Hull (2005) noted that from 1937 to the 1970s, British education system

used the term 'comparative religion' which was changed to 'the study of world religions' in the 1980s. The term 'multi-religious education' was also in use, until the 1988 Education Act used the term 'religious education'. In practice, the term 'religious education' refers to learning about multiple religious traditions (Tulasiewicz 1993). Comparatively speaking, the multi-religious approach is more prevalent in state schools, while faith schools tend to emphasize their own traditions (Kasem and Murphy Kassem and Murphy 2009). Ziebertz (2003 cited in Hull 2005) has claimed that 'religious instruction' was previously directed to both developing 'personal religiousness' and the capacity to 'judge the religious dimension of reality' (p. 7), but generally RE in Western countries is designed to support the attainment of social cohesion by increasing students' knowledge of, and tolerance toward, various religions.

The Indonesian concept of RE is quite different. In Indonesia this term has a particular meaning depending on which religion the student belongs to. Thus, Islamic RE, Christian RE, Buddhist RE, and so on are all distinct and separate subjects. RE in Indonesia is officially 'intended to mould learners to become a human being who is faithful and pious to the One and Only God, and who has morals and noble character' [The 2003 Education Act (EA), Chapter VI (Explanation)]. This contrasts with that of England, which reflects 'a broadly Christian character' in terms of values and customs, but has little theological content so that religious diversity in schools can be accommodated (Wolffe 1994). Therefore, White (2004) argues that English RE has widely adopted a multi-faith perspective (non-confessional) instead of focusing on a single tradition (confessional).

## 2.2 Multicultural approach

The concept of the 'multicultural' is used to explain the repositioning of the 'marginal' to the 'dominant culture' and the recognition of social diversity in terms of 'gender', 'social class' and other differences (Wilkerson 1997), including religious differences. One of the crucial problems within a multicultural society is how to ensure that every person has relatively similar opportunities to flourish, even if he or she is a member of a minority (Troyna 1984). Vitikainen (2015) proposes the so-called 'individuated-yet-culturally-sensitive approach' by which peoples' rights are treated 'on a case-by-case basis' (p. 185). This offers a way out for the liberal state that often limits its role in the fulfillment of general norms around the recognition of cultural differences, group membership, and minorities (pp. 187–188). Thus, the concept of multicultural society ideally refers to a situation where people, regardless of their numbers and different social backgrounds, participate in society on an equal basis, and realistically incorporates all societies in which there are significant cultural differences.

To determine whether or not a multicultural perspective has been cultivated in education, Lewis et al. (1997 cited in Wilkerson 1997) proposed six basic principles to apply to curricula. These are; 'incomplete personal visions', 'openness to the cultural other', 'face-to-face encounter', 'multiple perspectives', 'conflict and public debate', and 'reciprocal hospitality' (p. 331). The first of these deals with the curriculum goals, which incorporate diverse religious standpoints that are presented as valid. The second cultivates a positive and non-judgmental mentality towards diversity. The third and fourth inspire an attitude to meet others with different cultures and give every perspective an opportunity to flourish. If these diverse perspectives clash or are in tension, the fifth principle develops conceptual and practical models of how to manage conflicting perspectives and build healthy dialogue. The last principle is a commitment to respecting others in order for them all to feel safe. In

summary, these principles form the basis of designing and developing RE curricula that are appropriate to situations of socio-cultural diversity.

## 2.3 Critical approach

In England there have been important debates in regard to teaching strategies which can be applied in schools to appropriately deliver the RE curriculum (Hella and Wright 2009; Teece 2005; Wright 2003). Here, the 'critical approach' is our tool of analysis to examine how multicultural approaches chosen by state schools can be operationalized in teaching and learning strategies. However, defining critical RE is contentious and there is scholarly disagreement. Wright (2000, 2003), for instance, tends to focus on the diverse religious understandings of each student and criticism applied to various religious viewpoints. To be more critical, students should be intellectually prepared to participate in dialogue about religious and cultural diversity in terms of lived experience. Few high school students possess such competence as a result of their upbringing and education; the project of critical dialogue thus may fail to create possibilities for shaping common values among students to enable them to recognise social injustice, prejudice, and other. Therefore, the term 'critical' is used here with reference to building a broader knowledge base and deeper understanding about religions, not just as theoretical constructs, but as lived experiences with real-life consequences.

According to Darder et al. (2003, p. 72), the critical approach begins with an assumption that 'knowledge is a social construction'. In terms of religions, 'knowledge' means human understandings of particular doctrines and daily experiences, constructed as religious traditions. Yet it is possible that human understanding will be diminished by bias, ignorance or other limitations. According to Habermas, the kind of knowledge that should be promoted is 'emancipatory knowledge' which aims at building awareness and criticism of social injustice. Moreover, Foucault asserts that 'in critical terms, that actions and knowledge must be directed at eliminating pain, oppression and inequality' (p. 73). This type of critical approach is congruent with the multicultural standpoint, as both advocate a societal orientation in which every single group or culture can exist and flourish.

## 2.4 Teaching and learning strategies

An optimal application of an RE curriculum requires teaching and learning strategies that facilitate both the multicultural approach and the critical approach; it is not sufficient to present a range of different religions to students if there is no critical engagement, and a critical approach alone does not facilitate understanding of lived religion or promote citizenship values. Teaching and learning strategies that give students the opportunity to express their viewpoints and experiences are vital. Giroux (1981 cited in Darder et al. 2003) proposed three criteria of critical teaching; 'relevant', 'critical' and 'transformative'. He said that,

> Knowledge is relevant only when it begins with the experiences students bring with them from the surrounding culture; it is critical only when these experiences are shown to sometimes be problematic (i.e. racist, sexist); and it is transformative only when students begin to use the knowledge to help empower others, including individuals in the surrounding community. Knowledge then becomes linked to social reform' (pp. 92–93).

Classroom techniques have changed radically in the last thirty to forty years, and in the West the focus is now on an active, engaged, collaborative classroom, where the students work together as a learning community to construct knowledge, with the teacher as an expert learner who facilitates and participates in the process.

Villegas and Lucas (2002, p. 21) have proposed a six-point model for what they call 'culturally responsive teachers'. This model coheres strongly with the Lewis et al. (1997) curricula principles discussed above. Villegas and Lucas propose being 'socioculturally conscious', holding 'affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds', promoting 'learners' knowledge construction', being able to effect 'educational change', knowing about 'the lives of his or her students', and creating learning situations 'that builds on what [students] already know while stretching them beyond the familiar'. RE based on the multicultural and critical approach is consistent with this type of pedagogy, emphasizing as it does flourishing individuals who may have a commitment to their own beliefs but also manifest genuine interest and curiosity about the beliefs of others. Thus, diverse societies, diverse pedagogies, and critical approaches all work to develop positive attitudes towards social diversity, and encourage active participation in building a socially just society and world (Orchard 2015).

## 3 Religious education curriculum policy in England

### 3.1 Basic principles: politics, socio-culture and religion

RE in the UK is not a compulsory part of the national curriculum. The Education Reform Act (ERA) 1988 states that 'The Secretary of State has a responsibility to determine: a) 'attainment targets, b) programmes of study, and assessment arrangements' (Article 4, pp. 68–69). In practice, the task of designing the British school curriculum is not generally the purview of any parliamentary official or elected member. Rather, Ofqual and the Standards and Testing Agency (formerly the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency) are responsible for the National Curriculum. In the National Curriculum, it is clearly stated that Religious Education is part of the basic or statutory, but not included in the compulsory, National subjects. This means that it is provided locally in English schools, and is not nationally reviewed (DfE 2014, p. 7; Long 2016, pp. 3–5). All local authorities are required to establish a Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education (SACRE), which produces an Agreed Syllabus, which includes 'matters connected with religious worship in county schools and religious education', and also 'methods of teaching' and 'the provision of training for teachers' (ERA 1988, Article 11, p. 73). It is clear from these local government arrangements that the nation state supports the development of RE.

England is a particularly socially and culturally diverse society, which is reflected in the RE syllabi. The RE curriculum varies according to location, and should pay attention to 'contemporary societal demands of diversity and reality of human life' (Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007, p. 2). Birmingham's Agreed Syllabus also states that diversity, including 'race', 'gender' and 'differences in ability or disability', 'religious communities' and 'non-religious conviction', should be viewed as relevant to the social fabric of the region. RE has therefore been constructed: 'to appreciate and respect the life stances of others' (South Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus 2012–2013, p. 13); to 'develop in pupils an aptitude for dialogue so that they can participate positively in our society, with its diverse

religions and worldviews' (The Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2011–2016 [Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford], p. 4); and to create 'a sense of a shared humanity and the diverse cultural experiences and expressions of this' (The Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2015–2020, p. 9). If these foundational principles are observed, it is likely that each religious community would have appropriate opportunities to participate in society, and to flourish.

The syllabi all address three issues. First is the recognition that modern society has long been exposed to many 'faiths' and 'religious traditions' (see for instance, Birmingham Agreed Syllabus 2007; Cambridgeshire Agreed Syllabus 2013, p. 13). The second challenge is that of 'non-religious life stances' (Sutton Agreed Syllabus 2006, p. 8) such as atheism or Humanism. In reaction to such non-religious belief systems, the South Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus 2012–2013 states that RE is intended 'to develop an empathetic appreciation of how a practicing member of a religion lives out their faith in everyday life' (p. 12) and to build community cohesion. The capacity of RE to nourish students' spirituality and religiosity has often been noted. Within a complex and materialistic society, RE has been regarded as the programme to increase young people's awareness of their 'cultural, social, spiritual and moral development' (Nottinghamshire Agreed Syllabus 2015–2020, p. 12). RE recognises human potential as being not only physical or material, but also emotional and spiritual. Third, contemporary global society has a close relationship with religious dynamism. In this context, religious dynamism connects faith with full participation in life, not escaping or withdrawing from the world. It is clearly stated that RE should enhance students' skills to 'perceive the value of human beings, and their relationships with one another, with the natural world, and with God' (South Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus 2012–2013, p. 15).

## 3.2 Main issues of curriculum

Analysis of issues within the content of RE curriculum in England raises two points. The first is that the content cannot be separated from the systematic goals of RE as a school subject, from the national curriculum to the locally agreed syllabi. European education in general relies upon 'objective-driven' (Alistair 2000, pp. 116–133) or 'goal-directed' (Marsh 2004, pp. 27–28) curriculum design. This type of curriculum design first determines the learning goals and outcomes, and then builds the content and learning situations, assessments and participatory activities. The second point is that the content is a set of values, ideas and experiences that may vary in different local authority areas. The key documents are the 1998 ERA, EA (1996, 2002, 2011), the National Curriculum in England (DfE 2014), a curriculum framework for RE in England (Religious Education Council of England and Wales 2013), and several locally Agreed Syllabi. All of these regulations, theoretically, are in a hierarchy, descending from national to local levels.

Referring to the 1998 ERA, and as also stated in the EA (2002), the National Curriculum framework in a maintained or state-funded school in England must be balanced, which means that it both: a) 'promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society'; and b) 'prepares such pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (the Education Act 2002, Section 78; DfE 2014, p. 5; Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 7). Furthermore, it is stated that the aim of schooling is to create 'educated citizens' (DfE 2014, p. 6), future British generations that are valuable and responsible members of society, and who serve the national interest. It is vital to understand that Religious Education is perceived to make a valued contribution to these social goals. As the National

framework explains, the aims of RE are to lead students to: (a) 'know about and understand a range of religions and worldviews'; (b) 'express ideas and insights about the nature, significance and impact of religions and worldviews'; and (c) 'gain and deploy the skills needed to engage seriously with religions and worldviews' (Religious Education Council of England and Wales 2013; Long 2016, p. 12). These three aims clearly strengthen the knowledge base and positive disposition of students who complete the curriculum, which bodes well for their being good citizens in the puralistic society of Britain.

The possible contribution of RE may be limited, however; the 1996 EA stated that every agreed syllabus must 'reflect the fact that the religious traditions in Great Britain are in the main Christian whilst taking account of the teaching and practices of the other principal religions represented in Great Britain' (the 1996 Education Act, Section 375 (3); see also Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 10). As Britian is deemed to be historically Christian and in the present day to continue to value this Christian inheritance, it may be that religions with teachings that are explicitly contrary to Christianity might not receive attention. The recognition that not all British residents are Christian does mean that parents may choose to withdraw their children from RE classes for any reason, and this will be accepted by law. This may involve withdrawal of students to receive alternative religious education. The Framework provides that 'pupils may be withdrawn from the school during such periods of time as are reasonably necessary for the purpose of enabling him (sic) to receive religious education in accordance with the arrangements' (School Standards and Framework Act 1998, Section 71 (3); Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 28).

The 2002 EA, the 2010 Non-Statutory Guidance on RE, and locally Agree Syllabi require students to study Christianity at each key stage (KS), as well as other principal religions, and relevant philosophical or ethical issues for each KS. Christianity in the UK includes Anglican, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Non-Conformist and Pentecostal denominations. Other principal religions in the UK are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, Bahai'ism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism. The philosophical traditions studied are Humanism and Atheism. In the context of both religious and non-religious lifeways ethical and moral issues are investigated. These include; religion and science, sexuality, health, alcohol and drugs, prejudice and discrimination, equality and justice, war and peace, the environment and climate change, animal rights, and inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. In Sutton, for example, there are two issues that are investigated: 'an in-depth dialogue amongst different religions and non-religious stances such as humanism' (Sutton's Agreed Syllabus 2006, pp. 14–15; also see Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 13). However, non-religious standpoints like Humanism are not always included in locally Agreed Syllabi (DfE 2016, p. 2), and new religious movements (e.g., Church of Scientology, International Society for Krishna Consciousness, and others) to date have no place in the curriculum, though they are studied as part of tertiary Theology and Religious Studies curricula in the UK.

With regard to RE curriculum development, British schools are relatively free to enrich their curricula. The RE curricula are 'less prescriptive' (Department of Children, School and Families 2010, p. 5) than those of certain other subject areas. It could be said that British Government practices a 'proliferation centres' type of RE curriculum policy, meaning that the government endorses 'secondary centres' to make its curriculum more efficient (Kelly 2009, pp. 126–128), such as Local Authorities (LAs), SACREs and schools. Under the supervision of SACREs, RE content can be developed by the use of 'systematic study', 'thematic study' as well as 'cross-curricular study' approaches (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 24). The first focuses on studying

more religions and beliefs in detail; the second guides students to explore themes or issues based on one or more belief systems; while the third selects one or more subjects to explore certain 'key concepts'. This content development in RE makes space for innovative teaching strategies that teachers could adopt.

## 3.3 Teaching–learning strategies

The concepts of 'learning about' and 'learning from' religions and belief systems may be developed as a framework for particular attainment targets as issued by several of SACREs, but also be used to break down general to specific strategies (methods) of teaching and learning, or as 'the key processes' as previously stated by QCDA (2007). This governing body was abolished by the 2011 Education Act, but both concepts continue to be contested. Fancourt (2015) argues that both terms have been officially documented rather differently. In a non-statutory framework (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2004), 'learning about religion' means 'enquiry into, and investigation of, the nature of religion, its beliefs, teachings and ways of life, sources, practices and forms of expression…' (p. 11). On the other hand, 'learning from religion' relates to 'concerned with developing pupils' reflection on and response to their own and others' experiences in the light of their learning about religion… Pupils learn to develop and communicate their own ideas, particularly in relation to questions of identity and belonging, meaning, purpose and truth, and values and commitments' (p. 11). We argue that both terms remain valuable in the quest to bring dynamic ideas and practices into the teaching of RE. Certain recent locally agreed syllabi, such as North Yorkshire SACRE RE Agreed Syllabus 2013–2018 (p. 28), still use both terms in teaching processes, and they are applied to RE activities as stated in RE guidance (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 35).

In the RE guidance, the concept of learning 'about' and 'from' is detailed with graduated teaching activities, that is: (a) provoking 'challenging questions'; (b) encouraging 'pupils to explore their own beliefs'; (c) building 'their sense of identity and belonging; (d) developing 'respect for others; and (e) building 'their responsibilities' to communities and society (Department of Children, Schools and Families 2010, p. 8). It is also stated that such values as 'empathy', 'generosity' and 'compassion' are expected to be nurtured as students work through the curriculum. Thus, students acquire skills such as 'critical enquiry', 'creative problem-solving', and 'communication in a variety of media' and these skills are constantly being challenged and further developed (p. 35). By considering these types of learning processes, it is clear that methods developed from, and combined with, different models of learning such as active learning, cooperative learning and contextual teaching and learning (CTL) are all utilised in the RE classroom.

The recommended teaching and learning methods are officially guided by the locally Agreed Syllabi. The South Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus, for instance, describes a developmental process of learning, including 'questioning', 'discussing', 'explaining', 'demonstrating' and 'modelling' (pp. 328–330). Put simply, students are able to start asking or responding to questions, to have discussions in pairs, to try to explain and elaborate upon answers, to demonstrate their understanding as well as skills, and to give more examples or employ good practices. This syllabus also states that 'thinking skills' are required to engage deeply, elaborate on points, approach many-sided side arguments, and judge rationally (p. 329). In KS 4 for instance, students are directed to engage with deep and critical thinking skills, meaning that they 'investigate and analyse', 'develop', 'argue', 'use a range of research methods to examine and critically evaluate', and are capable of articulating their understanding of moral and spiritual standpoints (Nottinghamshire

Agreed Syllabus 2005–2020, p. 43). Such learning processes seem to promote and encourage higher level thinking skills. Different design elements are evident at KS 1 level (early education), in that students are encouraged to practice 'playing and exploring', 'active learning' and 'creating and thinking critically' (Manchester, Salford, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education 2011–2016, p. 13). The term 'playing' here indicates the importance of presenting new information in the form of games in a pleasurable environment. The selection and practice of certain methods of teaching and learning depends upon the level of study, and the students' possible potentialities.

## 4 Religious education curriculum policy in Indonesia

### 4.1 Basic principles: politic, socio-culture and religion

RE in Indonesia is part of the national curriculum and must be provided at all levels of education and in all types of schools (The 2003 EA, Article 37; The 2007 Government Regulation of RE (GRRE), Article 3). Both State and private schools from primary, through secondary, and onto higher levels must offer this subject. Ideologically speaking, the policy is underpinned by the 1945 Constitution (Amended), which states, 'The government shall manage and organize one system of national education, which shall increase the level of spiritual belief' (Article 30). Therefore, the State has long supported social integration, at least partially effected through the RE curriculum in schools.

Relating to social diversity, the 2003 EA states that 'education is conducted democratically, equally and non-discriminatorily based on human rights, religious values, cultural values, and national pluralism' (Article 4). As the former Minister of National Education stated in the foreword of this Act, the primary goal of education is to lead students to become those who engage with 'the spirit of brotherhood and solidarity'. Such a perspective is necessary in Indonesian society. Firstly, Puskur (2007a) notes that this country, with around 300 ethnicities, has long been at risk of social disharmony resulting from unequal economic development. Secondly, the possibility of intensive contact between various cultures as a result of social mobility should be based on a better understanding of the various cultures. Finally, the interaction with new technologies such as electronic media can escalate the rate of interactions, and even fuel possible conflict among social groups. To anticipate these potentially problematic social trends, education has a pivotal position to educate people to be socially responsible.

In regard to the religious principle in education, it has been stated that 'every learner in an educational unit is entitled to receive religious education in accordance with his/her religion, imparted by an educator who has the same religion' (the 2003 EA, Article 12). This regulation is based on the reason that individual religious authenticity needs to be preserved; the religious teacher who has the same religion as his or her students is able to maintain community among students (the 2007 GRRE (Explanation)). The choice of the mono-religious perspective for Indonesian RE is interesting to investigate, in particular because of the extent to which the consistency of the 2003 EA, and other regulations, builds on both the conviction for each religion and preserves social cohesion amongst various religions.

### 4.2 Main issues of curriculum

The systematic framework of RE in Indonesia is part of the national education system. At this level, the regulation explains that the mandate of the general education is given to the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and of religious education in particular, to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) (the 2007 GRRE, Article 3). In addition, MoNE has recently formed the National Agency for Education Standard (NAES), from which the national curriculum standard has been produced (The 2006 Regulation of the MoNE Number 22 and 23). RE in state schools also must refer to the national standards. The NAES standard then determines the attainment targets of the 2006 Curriculum. Additionally, the RE Curriculum in state schools can be developed in accordance with the unique character of each school, or to address other local conditions (The 2003 EA, Article 38). Thus, the framework of RE in the 2006 Curriculum must be in line with the NAES standards, but may be modified to suit school of local area needs.

The 2003 EA (article 3) reveals that 'intellectual capacity' and 'human values' are the key concepts underpinning the assertion that the main purpose of education is to make people individually pious, high achievers, and socially responsible. To assist in reaching this goal, RE has been conceptualized to enable students to 'understand and practice religious values' (The 2003 EA, Article 9). According to the GRRE, RE should motivate pupils to practice their religions, to create religious harmony, to build such character traits as honesty, trust, discipline, self-reliance, sincerity and responsibility, and to develop critical and innovative attitudes (The 2003 EA, Article 5). By taking account of the framework, it seems that RE is intended to be an incubator of both personally and socially responsible people.

In terms of religious experience, besides providing a type of RE that is religiously appropriate for each student, meaning that each class contains students that are all avowedly members of the same religion, every school must offer a worship place that fits with the religion embraced by each student. If this is not possible for all schools and all religious groups, it is permissible for schools to work together with other schools at the same level to conduct both RE teaching and religious worship (the 2007 GRRE (Explanation), Article 4). The flexibility of RE management is thus able to deal with the lack of infrastructure and human resources of certain schools, regarding RE teaching and activities.

Relating to the RE curriculum, the competence standards can be analyzed from the NAES decisions under the 2006 Regulation of the MoNE number 23. In this stipulation, there are some key competence standards, i.e. the competence standard of the schools' outputs, of subject matter groups, and of each specific form of RE (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism and Buddhism). Briefly speaking, under the first type of competence standard, each school must ensure that students are able to 'practice their own religion fitting with teenage development'; and that 'respect for social diversity in terms of religions, cultures, ethnicities and socio-economic groups at the national level' is observed (The 2006 Regulation of the MoNE Number 23, p. 4). The second type of competence standard refers to the topic of 'Religion and Noble Character' at all school levels. This mentions the subject aim of 'creating pupils who are faithful and pious to the One God and have noble characters' (The 2006 Regulation of the MoNE Number 23, p. 7). Further, each specific RE also educate students, for instance in the senior secondary level, in core values; being 'democratic' (Muslim), 'peaceful' (Christian), 'honest' and 'just' (Catholic) (p. 365).

Even allowing that the competence standards issued by the NAES may have enabled students to learn common values such as honesty and justice from their own religion, there has been criticism that this is not sufficient. There is an argument that multicultural issues need to be explicitly taught in public schools. In this respect, Puskur (2007a) considers the possible emergence of negative stereotypes and intolerance amongst different social groups, and argues that this must be reduced, and students must be educated to create more harmonious, cooperative society. The NAES has developed a model in which the issue of multiculturalism is not separated from the current curriculum, but integrated into some existing subjects including RE. Respecting social differences is conceptually based on the scriptures from each of the six recognized religions. From this viewpoint, it is clear that the effort to create a balance between teaching RE from an internal faith perspective for each RE stream does not ignore diverse social standpoints, but rather takes them into consideration in both curriculum content and teaching and learning strategies.

## 4.3 Teaching–learning strategies

The development of interesting and appropriate methods of RE teaching has been a contested subject in Indonesia. This is because there is evidence that, while RE has been regarded as a moral compass, its presence is often less prominent and less pedagogically sophisticated compared to other subjects (Puskur 2007a, p. 2). This parallels the optional status of RE in the UK, though there are other factors in play. There is a possible correlation with a core problem of RE teaching, that it tends to be monotonous and doctrinaire, lacking relevance to practical day-to-day living, and not connected to real social challenges. According to the 2007 GRRE, RE teaching should build on interactions, inspirations, creativity, happiness, and motivation to reach achievement (Article 5). Recently, the MoNE has developed a teaching approach by which a schooling process that is active, creative, effective and joyful can possibly take place. This type of teaching has actually become a trend of late, since the concepts of 'active learning' and 'pupil-centered learning' emerged to make education in Indonesia more progressive. However, from the documents being analyzed, this kind of viewpoint has been much less elaborated even if, generally speaking, it has been officially promoted.

The 2006 MoNE Regulation number 22 has explained that: firstly, curriculum in general should operate in a schooling process where a teacher and students show respect for each other; secondly, curriculum should be carried out by using a variety of pedagogical strategies and a multi-media approach, including information technology (p. 6). The former principle emphasizes human relations as a way for noble values to flourish. This perspective is often linked to the principles of being a teacher that is a: 'tut wuri handayani' (motivator); 'ing madya mangun karsa' (initiator); and 'ing ngarsa sung tulada' (role model). It may be argued that since the main purpose of RE in Indonesia is to strengthen one of the students' faith through interaction with a teacher of the same religion, the teacher as a role model whose behaviors become good practices for the students to cultivate is considerably emphasized. In other words, pupils can learn from teachers' actions and experiences (Puskur 2007b, p. 6). The latter principle explores the possibility of engaging students through the use of various learning resources. Thus, a teacher has both choice and control regarding his or her teaching practices. In the 2006 Curriculum teaching plan, furthermore, delivery of the curriculum must include learning processes which direct students to explore, elaborate, and personally confirm their understanding of RE materials (The 2006 Regulation of MONE number 41).

## 5 Comparison of Indonesian and English RE curriculum policy

The presence of RE in multicultural public spheres such as England and Indonesia is worthy of examination. Both countries have strong political and social support for RE in the state school system. As previously noted, RE in England is not compulsory, but remains part of the basic curriculum. The government does not determine the RE curriculum in detail at the national level, but the statutory body, SACRE, holds conferences in each locality to create locally Agreed Syllabi. The members of SACRE include Local Authorities (LAs), representatives of the Christian churches, teachers, and other religious figures, demonstrating the openness characteristic of English RE. In Indonesia RE is part of the national curriculum, so the government decides its framework, as well as assesses it. In practice, the MoNE has recently instituted a statutory body, the NAES, which has responsibility for the competence standards of all subjects in the national framework, including RE. The members of the NAES are not openly recruited, and lack the socio-religious diversity apparent in SACRE. One commonality is that the existence of RE in both the UK and Indonesia is politically supported, and it is believed to support the development of good citizens in a multicultural society.

There are important differences in the two countries. White (2004) explains that the UK is increasingly secular, and RE is not always understood as an independent subject, but may be integrated into PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education). Panjwani (2005) argues that RE can be replaced by 'education about religions', which focuses on offering information about a variety of religions as they exist in a secular, multicultural society. White and Panjwani's idea of the removal or replacement of RE might be adequate; the UK has a Christian established church (the Church of England) but has accommodated other religions and beliefs, and many citizens are not religious at all. We argue that the main issue is not whether RE should be replaced or even omitted, but rather how to empower it as a subject that maintains societal diversity and the need for cooperation amongst citizens of varied religions and beliefs. The policy recognises that all religions, and even individual lifeways, are valid and important, even this principle has often failed in the level of actual implementation (Vitikainen 2015, p. 6). Thus, the existence of RE which is supported by the state should not be seen as a threat but rather as a benefit to the future of social unity in diversity.

RE as a means of constructing social cohesion is a core focus in existing policy documents. We have found that RE in both countries offers guidelines that encourage religious respectfulness. A striking difference between Indonesia and the UK is that issues of anti-discrimination and racism are major themes in the locally Agreed Syllabi (see Han 1999, p. 175). RE in Indonesia emphasizes loyalty to one's own religion, and does not address religious differences, discrimination, or related ethnic tensions. It is interesting that the confessional type of RE in Indonesia emphasises good citizenship, tolerance, and togetherness as a community (Franck 2015). The preservation and furtherance of social cohesion is a core socio-cultural principle of RE in both countries, but the UK acknowledges the possibility of religious conflict openly, whereas Indonesia does not.

Clearly, RE in England is based upon the students' freedom to embrace or reject a particular religion or belief. The UK is a Christian nation, but multicultural and multifaith perspectives, along with non-religious standpoints such as Humanism or Atheism, are represented in RE syllabi. This openness is not present in Indonesian RE. As noted, RE in England has developed 'a multi-religious model' (de Velasco 2007) while Indonesia tends to be mono-religious (Leirvik 2004; Saerozi 2004; Zuhdy 2005). Further, RE in Indonesian

schools must be fitted to one of the six official religions, so there are students from other minority faith backgrounds who are excluded. RE in Indonesia aims to build 'commitment' (Hobson and Edwards 1999) to a particular religion, while in England RE permits religious exploration and rational judgment.

Copley (2008) argues that learning about religions tend to legitimize 'secular' rather than 'religious indoctrination' since the mode used is that pupils explore various religions or beliefs neutrally and academically. However, 'learning from religion' on the other hand, is likely to give pupils an opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs. In this respect, Maybury and Teece (2005) consider that what pupils learn about various religious phenomena might be generally the same amongst religions, but in terms of particular meanings, according to Franck (2015), each religious ritual, event, place, and artistic representation will be interpreted and valued differently. This difference in interpretation on the student's faith and attitude to the notion of 'eternal truth' that is inter-subjectively understood as manifested in all religions (p. 227). RE in Indonesia, promotes learning about one's own religion, and is intended to reinforce pre-existing conviction.

As a consequence of the multi-religious approach, the content of English RE is extremely varied, covering Christianity, other religions such as Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism—to mention some—and philosophical or ethical issues such as environmental issues, social conflict and peace, and non-religious perspectives are also included. In contrast to England, Indonesian schools must provide RE fitting with each pupil's religion, within the six recognised religions. Theoretically, students may be able to explore various religious sects or standpoints from within their own religion, depending upon the topic being studied. In the UK, some scholars have suggested that learning about religions is weak if it only denotes surveying various teachings of religions, without considering 'the ultimate goals' (Grimmit 1981, 1987, 2000, 2010, as cited in Fancourt 2015). At the same time, 'believing students' should be encouraged to empirically validate the truth claims of their faith on matters such as the good life as social justice (Fancourt 2015). This perspective suggests that, among some educators at least, there is sympathy toward a mode of pedagogy in RE that comes closer to the Indonesian confessional model.

Another core issue is worship experiences provided for pupils, which might contribute to shaping and strengthening religion and spirituality (Panjwani 2005; Louden 2004). Based on existing regulations, English schools must offer 'collective worship' as part of the package of RE teaching. Such an activity may include explicitly religious practices, which are mainly Christian, or exploration of values and themes collectively enacted in a classroom. Trainee teachers surveyed in the UK responded positively to collective worship, asserting that it was of value in enhancing the moral, spiritual, social, emotional and intellectual development of students (Mogra 2016). While this attitude would probably be found among Indonesian RE teachers, Indonesian schools provide 'religious worship' for their students that is strictly matched to the students' own religion. In the UK, it is legally permissible for parents to withdraw their children from these activities (and RE entirely), while in Indonesia there is no legal provision for such withdrawal. Therefore, both have different aspects of the worship held including the right of withdrawal typifying RE in the UK in general.

In the UK at KS 4 or the senior secondary level, pupils are oriented to study and investigate Christianity and at least one other principal religion. Issues such as the ultimate meaning of life and religious notions found in scripture, are taught alongside ethical issues such as environmentalism, poverty, peace, and conflict. Indonesian pupils only study their own beliefs, yet, they also learn about how their religion connects to such issues as the environment, peace and justice, and ethical relations with others. In other words,

Indonesian pupils tend to learn about social diversity from 'within' or from their 'home religion' (Hobson and Edwards 1999) while English pupils learn from multi-religious perspectives.

In England, RE has been devised to permit 'learning about religions', which emphasizes religious exploration, and 'learning from religion' which contains criticism and reflection on each own belief. In the former approach, pupils can explore the vocabulary and concepts, and events and experiences of various religions. The success of this pedagogical strategy has been questioned. Kay and Smith (2000a, b) found that pupils are very often confused about the meaning of terms and concepts when they study more than four different religions. Another aim of RE is to comprehend 'the core values' of any taught belief (Fancourt 2015). RE teaching has to be both well-informed and well-designed, to prevent any discussion of core values becoming too general. Pupils are encouraged to be critical and reflective regarding various religions and worldviews, and of their own beliefs. Pedagogical strategies to realise this include specific projects, based on conservation and ecology, or peace studies, for example. Indonesia's RE documents do not mention detailed teaching strategies. However, some dominant strategies can be identified: RE teachers function as role models; and experiential and interactive learning is favoured. Building on Lewis et al. (1997 cited in Wilkerson 1997) six basic principles of multicultural education and Villegas and Lucas' (2002, p. 21) model of 'culturally responsive teachers', English RE is more aligned to those conceptual frameworks than Indonesian RE.

## 5.1 Relevance of the recent religious education curriculum policy to multicultural issues

To examine whether or not the recent RE curriculum policy is appropriate to the idea of multicultural education, we will draw upon various scholars. These include: Wilkerson (1997) and Troyna (1984) on opportunities for a minority to achieve social acceptance; Vitikainen (2015) on the 'individuated-yet-culturally-sensitive approach'; Bank and Bank (1998) cited in Torres (1998) on the shape of societal contributions of every religious standpoint; Lewis et al. (1997) cited in Wilkerson (1997) on modes of interaction amongst religious adherents; and Villegas and Lucas (2002, p. 21) on 'culturally responsive teachers'. It is obvious that religious and non-religious minorities such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Humanism—to mention but a few—have an official place in the UK RE curriculum. Despite the UK being historically Christian, and Christianity being taught at every KS, minority faiths and worldviews are taught as well. This political acknowledgment occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, when migrant groups with different religious became a prominent part of modern British society (Hobson and Edwards 1999). Social diversity presents as both an opportunity and a threat; thus social cohesion has been the main theme of almost all locally Agreed Syllabi. Therefore the model of 'learning about' various religions and beliefs has been promoted to maintain socio-political stability.

The UK state interest to manage social diversity is a higher priority than the confessional viewpoint, which would promote Christianity as the faith of the UK, based on its historical dominance and contemporary relevance, as the UK has an established church, of which the monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, is the head. As Wright (2004) and Copley (2008) demonstrate, in UK schools religious commitment is not emphasized and the broad context is secular. The evidence indicates that each religious minority has been provided with opportunities to flourish, but as relativised creeds in a secular multicultural society. This plurality of viewpoints is likely to continue as the dominant model in the UK; Long's

(2015) report, DfE (2016) and the House of Lords Hansard (2016) documents indicate English RE is to have 'no obligation… to allocate "air time" according to the apparent popularity of a religious or non-religious view".

In Indonesia, the minority religions formally taught in schools are Protestant Christianity, Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Islam is the majority religion, but public schools are not required to be 'Islamic'. Since the 2003 EA, the acknowledgment of the so-called 'official religions' as modes of RE shows that Indonesia has developed a limited multiculturalism, which recognises existing religious groups, but does not promote multiculturalism as in the UK. The challenge of limited multiculturalism is that there are possibilities for discontent; for example, a protest by unrecognized minority group, or problems in the cultural adjustment of the minority to the majority group(s). Additionally, the trend of 'teaching for (religious) commitment' (Thiessen 1993) or the 'confessional approach' (Franck 2015), which strictly directs pupils into 'one view of the world in such a way they cannot see any other' (The FARE Report cited in Copley 2008, p. 25) is open to question. Franck (2015) argued that the confessional approach can fulfil the need for strengthening students' own beliefs. Such beliefs can be taught with 'core values' (Fancourt 2015) such as social justice, respectfulness, and community that inhere in the students' religion. Students can, for example, question and reflect upon their religion's teachings about social responsibility and other values such as democracy, honesty and justice (The 2006 Regulation of the MoNE Number 23, p. 365).

The decisive difference between the UK and Indonesia regarding recognising existing religious minority groups correlates with the possible contribution of each in the respective societies. Because of the single perspective of Indonesian RE, the idea of the 'national imaginary' (Braten 2015) starts from each citizen's religion. The societal vision of Indonesian RE is dependent upon the extent to which each pupil understands the meaning(s) of their own religious doctrines or values, and puts them into practice to make a positive contribution. In the UK there is some evidence that at KS 4, for instance, each religion is presented in terms of its theological and social teachings on creating a better society. In Indonesia, the NAES realizes that the existing curriculum seems not to have fully anticipated the recent more diverse Indonesian society. Therefore, it proposes a model of multicultural education integrated into the existing subjects including RE. This model correlates to a degree with the 'liberal multicultural approach' since the idea of multiculturalism or multi-religions is placed as a complimentary part of the existing curriculum (Bank and Bank 1993, cited in Torress 1998, p. 181). Each school takes responsibility to articulate the spirit of social diversity and respectfulness within its RE curriculum. In contrast, the UK employs a 'social democratic multicultural approach' (Bank and Bank 1993, cited in Torress 1998, p. 181) by which the RE curriculum seeks to accommodate the existing variety of socio-religious and even non-religious groups. The dominant religion, Christianity, shares space with religious and non-religious minorities, with the aim that all will flourish. Social and religious respect and tolerance in England is possibly influenced by the public discourse of Christianity and its treatment of minorities, and there is a direct influence of the societal to curricular level in RE (Braten 2015).

Another decisive factor is the extent to which interaction amongst pupils who have the same or different religions can create 'reciprocal hospitality' (Lewis et al. 1997, cited in Wilkerson 1997) as well as 'affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds' (Villegas and Lucas 2002, p. 21). The process of interaction, dialogue, and debates is key to creating positive attitudes of students towards social diversity. It seems that learning about and from religions as conceptualised in English RE can be a precondition for each pupil to become accustomed to sharing with and listening to others with different beliefs

and practices. This model would be a challenge for Indonesian pupils, who merely study about and from their own religion. The extent to which the particular RE provides teachings regarding human relationships as well as religious conviction, is variable in Indonesian RE.

## 6 Revitalization and possible improvement

In the UK, almost all the existing locally Agreed Syllabi assert that 'learning about (various) religions' is a way to strengthen a 'peaceful mission' (De Velasco 2007). However, Ofsted's (2004) finding suggests that materials provided for English pupils are often overly complex. Students experience difficulties trying to digest the abundant information, and often struggle to understand the core values of each religion or belief system, and how these values relate to a modern plural society. Felderhof (2004) argued that learning about diverse religions does not guarantee that pupils will understand the importance of social cohesion. To combat this issue, Franck (2015) suggested that 'practical investigations' rather than theoretical understandings of religion would be more effective. Moulin (2009) also criticizes the liberal aim of 'exploring' various religious perspectives, arguing that the outcome of such study should be for students to be personally and socially enhanced, not merely to have learned some facts. Rose (2006) reveals that many members of SACREs have identified a need to cultivate students' spiritual formation in their curricula. Birmingham's current Agreed Syllabus that gives more attention to ethical and moral formation has recently been paid (Barnes 2008). It is clear that of late there has been a shift in attitudes in the UK, in which spiritual development and moral responsibility are part of the education of RE students.

In Indonesia, on the other hand, an awareness of strengthening individual belief and morality has been emphasized. Zuhdy (2006) argues that such an individual focus is vital, in order for pupils to confidently involve themselves in a multi-religious society. Yet, Puskur (2007b) found that RE's materials taught are primarily linked to cognitive domains, while other aspects such as pupils' affections and sensibilites tend to receive little attention. It seems that both learning from one religion as in Indonesia, and learning about various religions as in England, both manifest similar issues. For example, there is evidence that in both curricula, students are overloaded with information, and learning materials tend to be overly cognitive. Further, the stated aim of building social cohesion and exemplary character for future citizenship, is significantly undercut by these problems. We argue that RE curricula need to be improved by greater focus on emotional and spiritual aspects, rather than cognitive materials.

We would argue that pupils can be assisted to be more critical of their roles in multicultural society. First, RE offers a generous intellectual space in which they can express and discuss their knowledge, experiences, and readings about social hegemony, oppression and injustice that occur in their society locally and globally (Freire 1970 and Giroux 1983 cited in Darder et al. 2003). These complex discussions can be facilitated by interactional models of teaching (Lewis et al. 1997 cited in Wilkerson 1997) as well as a focus on cultural responsiveness (Villegas and Lucas 2002). Some of the themes taught at KS 4 in English schools (for example, conflict, war, and poverty) can be viewed from both the students' own standpoint and the standpoints of other belief systems. The aim here is for pupils having the same or different religions can build a common awareness of various humanitarian crises. This understanding may then become an entry point to building inter-

religious relationships directed to solving common issues. This is the so-called 'socialist multicultural approach', by which, regardless of their different religious commitments, pupils can share their knowledge and critique of existing conditions, and move toward solutions to social disasters and injustice (Bank and Bank 1993, cited in Torress 1998). From this perspective, RE would be most valuable when it empirically correlates with real problems in society of the students who are studying it.

Second, epistemologically speaking, there must be awareness of the limitations of people in understanding religious prescriptions on the one hand, and social issues on the other. This leads to the recommendation that pupils should be educated to excel at intense discussions and collaborative projects. Darder et al. (2003) and Wright (2000 in Grimmit 2000) state that knowledge and experience are individually and socially constructed; students can have 'multitude experiences' (Franck 2015) by culturally sharing with each other. It is vital that teachers have the capacity to get students to engage with each other in reconstructing understandings from their experiences (Villegas and Lucas 2002). In this sort of classroom, teacher-centred learning is old-fashioned: it is authoritarian; and does not fit with the aim of the flourishing of all students. It is recommended that teachers use more interactive types of pedagogy. This kind of strategy is likely to reduce the possible hegemony of understanding coming from dominant figures (whether the teacher or particular students). The more empathy, interactivity, collaboration, and respectfulness the teacher and students practice, the more 'reciprocal hospitality' amongst them will come into existence (Lewis et al. 1997 cited in Wilkerson 1997).

Finally, Giroux (1981) cited in Darder et al. (2003) and Villegas and Lucas (2002) proposed that learning should start from pupils' personal experience and concern issues that affect the environment where they live. In England for instance, students can survey and evaluate the issues of racism and terrorism, which are publicly debated, according to their own understandings and from various religious standpoints. Meanwhile, in Indonesia students can also debate such issues as particular social conflicts, violence and natural disasters, which very often occur. Giroux recommends that the issues studied are problematic in terms of pupils' life or their communities at large. The final step in this process is that pupils can develop a valuable framework for what Giroux called 'transformative' actions, in which, with their teachers or communities, pupils can create plans and programmes to resolve social issues. At this point, pupils can actively be involved in campaigns and projects in the community. By so doing, there is a likelihood that 'the planned curriculum' as documented (Kelly 2009) becomes contextualised within the real issues of the students' lives.

## 7 Conclusion

This article has investigated similarities and differences of RE curriculum policy in England and Indonesia. Some evidence suggests both have a relatively similar focus; RE is politically situated to maintain social cohesion and harmony through the provision of accurate information about different religons in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. However, each has unique aspects; for example, religious diversity in Indonesia tends to be limited, while in England it has a broader scope. This decisive difference has influenced the respective curricula. Indonesia's RE curriculum for state schools offers mono-religion suitable for each pupil's faith, whereas the English RE curriculum accommodates multi-religious and non-religious viewpoints. The liberal mindset of English RE teaching is

accentuated by the exploration of various beliefs in order for pupils to rationally reflect on their own belief systems. At this point, pupils can be either neutral about or imbued with a particular belief. In contrast, Indonesia's RE places emphasis on strengthening each pupil's religion. Further, methodologically, English RE emphasizes exploration, criticism and reflection on materials, and pupils are also encouraged to get involved in certain religious actions. In contrast, Indonesia's RE focuses on conceptual and experiential learning of each pupil's own religion. Therefore, the most obvious finding from this study is that religious exploration and criticism are typical of English RE and religious commitment and judgment are typical of Indonesian RE.

In terms of the multicultural approach, Indonesian pupils are educated to understand social problems based on their own standpoints while English pupils are educated to understand them referring to various beliefs. The main challenge is unlikely to depend upon how many religions the pupils learn about but the extent to which values and notions of diversity, cooperation and togetherness are comprehended. Put simply, the mono-religious standpoint as practiced in Indonesia does not threaten multiculturalism as long as it builds on social tolerance from the students' 'home' religion to other religions. The multi-religious perspective as promoted in England could fail to endorse social cohesion if the focus is on religious exploration, rather than shaping mindsets and mentalities that facilitate flourishing together. As an educational process, Indonesia's RE is determined by the internal dynamics of its own community in learning about and from socio-religious issues. Such a process can be a gateway to religious dialogue, and cooperation with other religious practitioners. English RE is similarly synchronised to broader social processes, but its success depends more upon the extent to which the curriculum minimizes the impact of overly complex learning materials, and facilitates constructive project-based learning among students. We argue that in order to maximize its effectiveness as a values-based subject, RE in both countries needs to renew pedagogical strategies by applying the multicultural approach, in which each individual and group is able to mutually cooperate and realise the social cohesion that is the core value of RE (Grimmit 1981, 1987, 2000, 2010, cited in Fancourt 2015).

As this study is focused on a document analysis of 'the official' (Pollard 2008) or 'planned curriculum' (Kelly 2009) of RE as designed for Indonesian and English state schools, there are many possibilities for future research into religious or values-based curricula, teaching and learning techniques, and the assessment and review of such programmes. Moreover, empirical research among teachers and students on how RE operates in classrooms and the wider community, as well as the level of instructional and experiential curricula (Braten 2015) also merit further investigation.

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