

The selection I planned to focus on was my first point that the cultural studies approach to religion and religious literacy helps develop an internal framework for thinking about where one's religion sits within society and allows one to ascribe reason based on a variety of sources.

I went to an international US-curriculum-based school in Jakarta, Indonesia that has integrated religious studies as an after-school class for Indonesian citizens due to government regulations. I decided that writing a letter to my high school about adding a cultural studies-based inter-religion class that provides students a platform to learn more about other religions within the cultural studies lens both from educators and from their peers' lived experiences.

The reason I target my high school is that I see high school (under the US/US-like school curriculums) as the point in education where students' paths start to diverge, but if need be educators can still place requirements and control the scope of this divergence. To me, the cultural studies approach provides not only a framework for analyzing religions, but for thinking more critically about how they stand within society. Growing up in Indonesia, where religion and ethnicity has been a huge proponent of political discourse, I felt that exposing younger audiences that have the intellectual maturity to engage with the topic sets them up to understand the reasons behind this phenomenon and make informed decisions under similar future circumstances.

Combined with the updated Indonesian education laws (as of 2013) that incorporated a religious studies requirement for schools, I felt that this complemented existing attempts to increase education about religion in Indonesia. While the form of religious education in question focuses more on the faith-based approach, doing so does not invite individuals to really think about how their religion coexists with others (not just in Indonesian society, but even in other countries as we have seen in class). I felt that taking the cultural studies approach and placing it alongside the faith-based approach helps provide insights into two sides of the same coin.

Being an international school in Indonesia also provides the perfect grounds for such changes to be implemented — the very diverse backgrounds (both ethnically and faith-wise) can lead to more fruitful discussions among students, while concurrently providing a means for students to develop religious literacy. An inclusive platform ensures that anyone can engage with the content and be able to prepare themselves to face other contexts where religion comes into play, be it locally or globally. While the proposal is currently limited to one school due to my personal

experience, I strongly believe that this is scalable across all schools in the country. Overall, I see this platform as the best way to take my idea that a cultural studies approach is applicable outside of religion as well, but religion remains a strong medium to teach it.

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