

***Merdeka Belajar* in Islamic Education on Ahmadiyya Students' Perspective**

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ABSTRACT: *Ahmadiyya students represent a minority group within an educational setting dominated by the Sunni majority. This article explores their interpretation of freedom to learn in the context of Islamic Religious Education, which is largely shaped by the prevailing Sunni ideology encountered in classrooms and schools. The study employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method. Nine students from SMPN 16 Mataram were selected as informants. Based on in-depth interviews and observations, the findings reveal that Ahmadiyya students generally feel they are treated equally to other students and do not experience institutional discrimination. Nevertheless, they occasionally face negative treatment from peers. Despite the absence of overt discrimination, these students do not experience full educational freedom. The content of Islamic Religious Education often contradicts Ahmadiyya theological perspectives, particularly concerning the prophethood of Muhammad, Jesus, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Additionally, they face challenges in participating in congregational prayers held in the school's mushalla, as their doctrine stipulates that such prayers should ideally only be conducted with fellow Ahmadiyya adherents in Ahmadiyya mosques. Their compliance with school practices is largely a strategy to adapt, maintain personal safety, and avoid conflict, ridicule, or acts of aggression. This study has certain limitations due to the limited availability of research subjects to junior high school students, whose ability to provide in-depth responses is constrained. The originality of this research lies in its exploration of Ahmadiyya students' self-conception and their interpretation of freedom to learn within Islamic Religious Education in a school environment dominated by the Sunni majority.*

Siswa Ahmadiyya merupakan kelompok minoritas dalam lingkungan pendidikan yang didominasi oleh mayoritas Sunni. Artikel ini mengeksplorasi interpretasi mereka tentang kebebasan belajar dalam konteks Pendidikan Agama Islam, yang sebagian besar dibentuk oleh ideologi Sunni

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yang dominan di ruang kelas dan sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode fenomenologis. Sembilan siswa dari SMPN 16 Mataram dipilih sebagai informan. Berdasarkan wawancara mendalam dan observasi, temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa Ahmadiyya umumnya merasa diperlakukan setara dengan siswa lain dan tidak mengalami diskriminasi institusional. Namun demikian, mereka terkadang menghadapi perlakuan negatif dari teman sebaya. Meskipun tidak ada diskriminasi yang nyata, para siswa ini tidak merasakan kebebasan pendidikan sepenuhnya. Isi Pendidikan Agama Islam seringkali bertentangan dengan perspektif teologis Ahmadiyya, terutama mengenai kenabian Muhammad, Yesus, dan Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. Selain itu, mereka menghadapi tantangan dalam berpartisipasi dalam salat berjamaah yang diadakan di *mushalla* sekolah, karena doktrin mereka menetapkan bahwa salat tersebut idealnya hanya dilakukan bersama sesama penganut Ahmadiyya di masjid-masjid Ahmadiyya. Kepatuhan mereka terhadap praktik sekolah sebagian besar merupakan strategi untuk beradaptasi, menjaga keselamatan pribadi, dan menghindari konflik, ejekan, atau tindakan agresi. Penelitian ini memiliki beberapa keterbatasan karena terbatasnya ketersediaan subjek penelitian untuk siswa SMP, yang kemampuannya untuk memberikan tanggapan mendalam terbatas. Orisinalitas penelitian ini terletak pada eksplorasi konsep diri siswa Ahmadiyya dan interpretasi mereka tentang kebebasan belajar dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam di lingkungan sekolah yang didominasi oleh mayoritas Sunni.

Keywords: *Freedom to Learn, Self-Concept, Ahmadiyya.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Freedom of thought is the substance demanded by Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education and Culture in the second phase of President Jokowi's era (Lathifah et al., 2022; Munawir et al., 2024; Siregar et al., 2020). In meeting these demands, teachers are expected to be able to present a sense of independence in learning with a student-centred paradigm, that learning is centred on students with their independence and freedom in the process of thinking and strengthening their talents and interests (Hosaini et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023; Yulianto, 2022).

However, it must be admitted that educational institutions are patterned in the organisation and ideology they fight for. Quoting Gerald L. Gutek's view on ideology in educational institutions, it can be emphasised that the cultivation of ideology is at least manifest in three forms, namely educational policies and goals, hidden curriculum, and curriculum formulation (Gutek, 2016; Maimun et al., 2021). This condition allows for the lack of independence of students due to ideological conflicts between educational institutions and other educational institutions, even between educational institutions and teachers or students (Lestari, 2021; Rifai & Suwarno, 2025; Sari et al., 2024). Ahmadiyya members experience such situations and conditions as a minority group in the educational institution environment that adheres to the faith of the Sunni majority (Yusuf, 2023).

Ahmadiyya is a group that identifies itself as *Jama'ah Islamiyah*, originating from India (Alnizar et al., 2023). In the Indonesian context, they are known as the Indonesian Ahmadiyya Jama'ah (JAI). They believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of Ahmadiyya, was a prophet after the Prophet Muhammad and a reformer in Islam (Monica et al., 2023). Based on this view, the MUI issued fatwa number 11/MUNAS VII/MUI/15/2005 which affirmed that the Ahmadiyya group is a heretical and misleading congregation (Alnizar et al., 2021; MUI, 2005). Wibowo (2013), through his research, then stated that the MUI methodically does not use the hierarchical procedure of Islamic law sources with good practices, and implicitly, this fatwa also has a negative impact on the appearance of restrictions on freedom of thought in society.

What happened in Lombok about the rejection of the existence of the Ahmadiyya and the physical conflicts that are still vulnerable from 1983 until now leave a space of intolerance even in educational institutions that bring them together between the majority Sunni and the minority Ahmadiyya in the same space (Arsana & Ketut, 2024; Nurhikmah, 2017). This raises a deep psychological burden, especially in the learning of Islamic religious education, material that is in direct contact with their respective existence and beliefs.

In the context of Ahmadiyya, there are several studies, including Ratnawati (2020) research in 2020 at SMA PIRI 1 Yogyakarta, which was carried out to develop Islamic Religious Education in strengthening the vision of Islamic moderation for its students. The study results show that Islamic Religious Education lessons at SMA PIRI 1 are developed by prioritising a multicultural approach through curriculum development, development of media and learning resources, and religious and multicultural culture in schools.

Yusuf (2023) research, published in the journal *Education and Counselling* in 2023, on the analysis of Ahmadiyya group conflicts, their impact, and resolution in Sukabumi. The study's results revealed the need for: 1). socialisation of tolerance in religion by MUI 2). Socialisation of national unity and harmony by members of the Sukabumi Military Command 3). Babinsa Mediation; 4). There are joint activities 5). Addition of Koramil Posts in vulnerable places.

Research by Muzakkir (2011) states that the minoritization of Ahmadiyya in Indonesia is a phenomenon that occurred after the reform. The results of his research stated that, based on the condition of Ahmadiyya, it allowed the process of minoritization that could take place in the form of two things, namely the strengthening of radical Islamic groups and the weak political leadership of the government. Outside the formal political arena, anti-Ahmadiyya groups are increasingly free to express their views on Ahmadiyya heresy, often even through acts of violence.

Wahyudi (2015) in his research on the marginalisation of Ahmadiyya revealed that Ahmadiyya made adjustments to social actions in society. This is shown by a series of realities, namely: (1) that they have a solid foundation of belief, so that even in stressful situations, they are not easily weakened; (2) the marginalisation or minoritization experienced is seen as a potential that can increase the spirit of collectivity that is increasingly organised and make the movement more existent either with the attributes of its community or without it; (3) the accommodative movement carried out by the Ahmadiyya contributes positively to maintaining the stability of the State and can develop humanitarian activities; and (4) the ability of Ahmadiyya to orient its movement through the mechanism of reinterpreting its beliefs can open up a significant

accommodating space. The self-adjustment process by the Ahmadiyya minority group strengthens their social resilience.

In contrast to some of the studies above, this study was conducted to find out the meaning and self-concept of Ahmadiyya students towards their independence in learning Islamic education in public schools, which mostly adhere to the Sunni understanding. This ideology is different from theirs.

II. METHOD

This research departs from a constructivist paradigm that provides space for researchers to build the meaning of the reality of Ahmadiyya students in Lombok, especially the city of Mataram. They represent a minority group that has intensive interaction in a school environment with the Sunni majority. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological type, because it seeks to understand the subjective perceptions of Ahmadiyya students about what they feel in learning Islamic religious education and how they take attitudes and position themselves. The data source for this study is 9 Ahmadiyya students who studied at SMPN 16 Mataram. The data collection methods used were interviews and observations. The validity test of the data was carried out through a credibility test using the techniques of extension of participation, observation diligence, and triangulation. As for the data analysis, the researcher carried out a phenomenological analysis and then used Charles H. Cooley's view of self-concept as a theoretical analysis tool that maps the subjective views of Ahmadiyya students.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews with 9 Ahmadiyya students, it was admitted that they did not feel full independence in learning Islamic religious education. This is due to two main aspects, namely the learning environment aspect and the learning material aspect.

Aspects of the Learning Environment

In this aspect of the learning environment, there are two conflicting realities between leaders, managers and teachers who give good treatment on the one hand, and some students who give bad treatment on the other. Ahmadiyya students admitted that the school had treated them fairly. No rules limit them from expressing their aspirations, developing themselves and participating in any learning program regardless of background, organisation, race or class. Ahmadiyya students also felt that the teachers in the school, especially Islamic religious education teachers, treated them well, just as they treated other students.

This is strengthened by the results of observations that show that schools in Mataram are generally open to the public. No school has closed itself and banned various groups from attending school, including Ahmadiyya members. There are also almost no discriminatory actions taken by schools against students of different ethnicities, races, religions, and groups. The researchers examined how Ahmadiyya students get along with teachers and other students. Researchers didn't see anything strange about how they got along with others, such as showing shame, fear, and humiliation.

In contrast to all this, Ahmadiyya students also admit that they sometimes receive insults, bullying and unkind treatment from some students both in and out of class.

Treatment in the classroom is shown by cornering and questioning the last Prophet and the Ahmadiyya beliefs in class discussions. In the context of this discussion, the teacher then gave an answer based on the majority view, including affirmation based on the MUI fatwa. Meanwhile, outside the classroom, the bad treatment is shown by making fun of them with the name heresy, which is done in front of other students. This condition indicates that their existence is not fully accepted.

For Ahmadiyya students, social interaction with others at school and home is a must-do, even if it is not treated as such. As Ahmadiyya citizens, they realise that they are just refugees, and must be good at adapting and carrying themselves. The bad treatment that arises is impossible to resist, because the more they resist, the greater the retribution, and it makes them more desperate, as happened to their parents, who were expelled from their previous village.

Aspects of Learning Materials

Ahmadiyya students in the process of learning Islamic religious education are faced with the acceptance of many materials delivered by teachers, either the same or different from what they learn at home, because in reality Islamic Religious Education Teachers provide learning materials referring to the content in the government curriculum, so that practically the handbook that is a reference is a book recommended by the government.

They admit that some of the Islamic Religious Education subject matter is the same as what parents and their organisations teach at home, such as lessons about prayer, reading the Qur'an or others. However, they do not deny that some other material differs from their beliefs. Among the differences lies the belief about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who is believed to be the Imam Mahdi and even a prophet. According to the majority, Imam Mahdi had not yet been born or resurrected to Earth, and the Prophet Muhammad was the last.

In the context of this difference, they only agree and obey the teacher's explanation without refuting it, because for them what the teacher said about the Prophet Muhammad and the Prophet Isa or other material, is nothing more than additional knowledge, even the learning material presented will not change their belief about Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, nor will the belief that the Prophet Isa died and was not taken to heaven.

Another difference is related to congregational prayer. They have the view that Ahmadis should only pray in congregation with fellow Ahmadis; outside of them, it is haram. Their parents taught them to do it in the Ahmadiyya mosque all the time, not only because of their faith, but also because of their safety from unwanted things. Meanwhile, in the context of schools, they face a different environment. They admitted there were difficulties in avoiding them, but they had always followed school rules. They continue to pray with teachers and other students in a congregation, even though it is against their beliefs. In this context, they contrived it by choosing to pray at the front of the *shaf* to avoid a more fatal mistake, because for Ahmadis it is not permissible to pray behind non-Ahmadis.

They are committed to whatever is applied and explained by PAI teachers about Islam; they accept it as science. If it is contrary to the Ahmadiyya creed, then they choose the Ahmadiyya faith according to what their parents conveyed. In this condition, they must agree with and accept the teacher's opinion and do not need to contradict it because they

feel that their capacity and knowledge are inadequate. Here's a graph illustrating this problem:

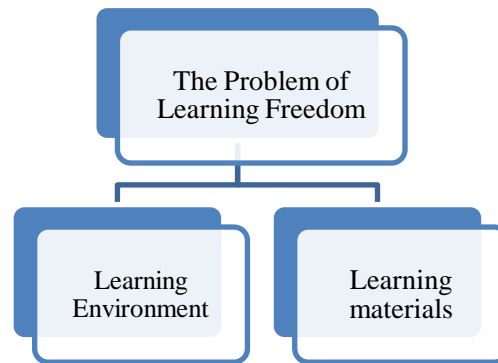


Figure 1. *The problem of freedom of learning of Ahmadiyya students*

When asked about their interpretation of the independence and independence of learning in the majority environment, especially in learning Islamic Religious Education, they believed that they liked Islamic Religious Education in general, because it has many similarities with the teachings of Ahmadiyya. As for some differences, they choose to be silent and passive, even though they are not accepting. But because they realise they do not have the capacity and strength to refute, they choose to adjust. For Ahmadiyya students, their beliefs are the reason for always protecting their actions and deeds from other groups. This was revealed as a form of obligation and obedience to his parents and the Ahmadiyya teachings he believed.

Freedom of Learning and Self-Conception of Ahmadiyya Students

In the discourse of freedom of learning, the reality of Ahmadiyya students invites us not only to talk about formal education, but also a government mandate that all educational institutions follow. More than that, substantively, independence should ideally focus more on students' interests and individual freedoms (Azah et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2024; Wardiyah et al., 2023). In the concept of independent learning, independence is indeed oriented towards student freedom, contextual and meaningful learning, character formation and self-understanding so that students think freely, innovate, and are independent and creative (Lathifah et al., 2022; Munawir et al., 2024; Yulianto, 2022). This paradigm departs from two major theories, namely humanism, which makes humans the centre of attention by emphasising individual freedom on the one hand (Herpanda & Neviyarni S, 2022; Juliangkary et al., 2023; Nahdiyah et al., 2023), and constructivism that allows individuals to learn to build themselves through their environment on the other hand (Muflich & Nursikin, 2023; Parnawi, 2023). This aligns with Charles H. Cooley's thinking about self-conception, "the looking glass self," which maps social space as a self-parameter. Individuals are given space to express themselves, try various things, and get feedback from their environment (Revo & Neviyarni, 2024).

Based on this perspective, the reality of Ahmadiyya students in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning shows three important processes: *first*, how others perceive them, second, how others judge them. Third, how they develop feelings or self-image based on other people's responses (López-Escobar, 2021; Revo & Neviyarni, 2024), first conception. Ahmadiyya students feel seen as a minority group with different understandings who receive the same treatment without being discriminated against by

teachers and schools. But sometimes they get bad treatment through insults from fellow students.

Factually, school as a learning environment provides freedom to learn without problems with family and organisational backgrounds, especially shown by teachers and managers. Therefore, Ahmadiyya students feel well-treated. This condition is ideal because the school, as Habermas (1984) revealed, is indeed one of the public spaces. In this space, a community gathers to achieve the same goals and share stories about various personal and group problems. Schools should treat their citizens equally regardless of origin and background. However, the school environment is not safe for Ahmadiyya students because some of the other students treat them discriminatorily, insult them and question their status as Ahmadi. This means that the learning environment as a social mirror does not guarantee their freedom and thus allows for the emergence of responses that illustrate their lack of independence (Nurhikmah, 2017).

The *second* conception is that Ahmadiyya students realise that they are a minority group that is in the learning environment of the majority group. There is a perverse judgment pinned on them so that they get rejection.

Theoretically, Ahmadiyya students admit that the learning of Islamic Religious Education in schools generally teaches inclusivity, which is manifested in the form of differences in madzhab, differences in understanding, differences in religious practices, such as the beginning of fasting in the month of Ramadan and also the implementation of Eid al-Fitr (Pudjiani & Mustakim, 2021; Suryatini & Asy'ari, 2022). In practice, Islamic Religious Education teachers also teach about open-mindedness, providing space to express opinions and prioritising tolerance in differences of understanding. However, Ahmadiyya students do not dare to express their views according to their beliefs that they have different views on some subject matter, such as prophethood, the death of the Prophet Jesus and the practice of congregational prayer. This is because their status as Ahmadiyya members who are declared heretical makes them realise that they are a minority and cannot deal with the majority group that has previously rejected them. This conscious attitude shows their subjective understanding of freedom of thought that is confined by anxiety and fear, some of which are illustrated in Maryam's novel about the condition of the Ahmadiyya group (Alifah & Haryanti, 2022).

The *third* conception is realising the reality of not being free, where Ahmadiyya students get the fact that they are in a mostly different learning environment, Islamic Religious Education Lessons follow the government curriculum which is partly different from their beliefs, they also feel that there is discriminatory treatment that they experience during learning whether it is done in the classroom or outside the classroom. This makes them prefer to remain silent, even when adapting and making accommodations to avoid conflict. Nevertheless, they remain committed to their own beliefs.

These actions are based on Mead (1936) perspective that, as individuals, minority students will act based on the meaning of the symbols learned and obtained from their social interaction with the learning environment. Subjective views of oneself and objective views of the outside world, in this case, the majority, will shape one's concept and act adaptively as the results of Rosyid (2019) research in Kudus, Central Java. Likewise, the results of Wahyudi (2015) research affirm that the Ahmadiyya group has strong beliefs, further increases its collective spirit, and is accommodating. Interestingly, when freedom of opinion is not available, Ahmadiyya students can innovate in learning Islamic Religious Education, such as in the implementation of

congregational prayers, they are adaptive to praying at the front shaf as a middle way, because according to their belief, praying behind non-Ahmadiyya is haram.

As Ahmadiyya students explain, awareness of their background as Ahmadi shapes their behaviour and attitude to stay vigilant and care for themselves at school. They tend to be more careful in speech and behaviour. In addition to being able to accommodate the teachings of the Ahmadiyya group itself, it also continues to follow school standards based on the teachings of the majority. The adaptive actions carried out by the Ahmadiyya students show that they can carry out independent actions despite being under pressure.

The attitude of Ahmadiyya students, in addition to representing the will and thoughts desired by the ideology of their organisation, namely the understanding of Islam that has always been internalised since they were children, a period that in the perspective of Berger & Luckman (2018) is referred to as primary socialisation in internalisation (Berger & Luckman, 2018; Dharma, 2018), they have also sought to break away from different understandings in school. This means they are between two religious doctrines, namely the family doctrine with a minority understanding of the Ahmadiyya and the doctrine of a school with a majority Sunni understanding. Faced with these two choices, between the limitations of Ahmadiyya and the ideology of the majority, they prefer family beliefs even though they are in the minority. They tend to be defensive, quiet and defend with their own beliefs. This condition is illustrated in the following graph:

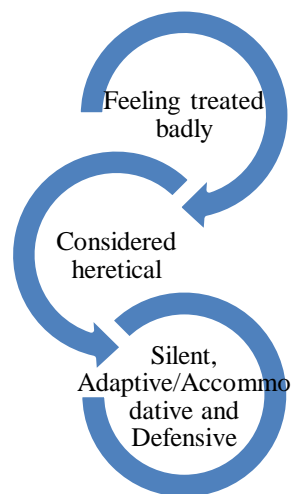


Figure 2. *The process of self-conception of Ahmadiyya students*

This proves that the main factors, the values obtained from the family environment since birth, are more dominant in shaping the individual's self-concept. Cooley in 1929 divided such groups into primary and secondary groups. The primary group is the elderly, while the secondary group is the outside environment, such as the school (López-Escobar, 2021; Revo & Neviyarni, 2024). In the case of Ahmadiyya, it can be seen that the dominant group is much stronger than the secondary group. In other words, the subjective self-concept of Ahmadiyya students formed from the primary group, namely the family, is not easily shaken by the pressure of the secondary group in the form of schools. Berger & Luckman (2018) expresses the same thought in his construction of social reality that the values that children receive from an early age have a very strong influence and are difficult to shake. Therefore, maintaining beliefs in a silent, adaptive, accommodating and defensive way is a way of interpreting their

independence in the limitations they face. This choice is based on motives with strong rationalisation to avoid conflict and larger social problems.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ahmadiyya students understand themselves as people who have to give in to Islamic religious education. They realise that they are in a learning environment that is predominantly Sunni, an understanding that is different from their beliefs. They get bad treatment from the learning environment, especially from fellow students, and even get material contrary to their beliefs. This condition requires them to be passive, adaptive, accommodating, and defensive to avoid conflict, insults, and bigger problems.

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