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## International Students in Indonesia's Religious Educational Institution: The Socio-Economic Impact & Peace Building Initiative

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### Abstract:

Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, has a variety of religious schools. They wield a massive influence over society, culture, and the intellectual life of the nation. However, at the global school level, even with Indonesian religious secondary school strength using high institution standards, sponsored by several organizations, penetration is very small, particularly at the international students level. The main objective of this study is to investigate the possibility of religious educational institutions in Indonesia increasing their international student admissions and to highlight the socioeconomic and academic advantages that could provide to the country. This study adds to the literature by identifying Indonesia as an unusual example — a leading center of moderate religious education within a pluralistic society—and one that has received less attention in global religious studies debates. Moreover, it provides an intersectional account of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Indonesia's religious educational facilities and recommendations for strengthening their international profile and presence in the global education ecosystem.

### Keywords:

religious educational institution,  
international student,  
intercultural understanding,  
socio-economic impact

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## 印尼宗教教育機構的國際學生：社會經濟影響與和平建設倡議

### 摘要：

印尼是世界上人口最多、穆斯林佔大多數的國家，擁有各式各樣的宗教學校。這些學校對社會、文化和國家的知識生活有著巨大的影響力。然而，在全球學校層面上，即使印尼的宗教中學在幾個組織的贊助下，以高標準的學校實力，滲透率仍然非常小，尤其是在國際學生層面。本研究的主要目的是調查印尼宗教教育機構增加招收國際學生的可能性，並強調這可能為國家帶來的社會經濟和學術優勢。本研究將印尼視為一個不尋常的例子——多元社會中溫和和宗教教育的領導中心——而這個例子在全球宗教研究的辯論中較少受到關注，因此本研究對文獻有所補充。此外，本研究提供了印尼宗教教育設施所面臨的獨特挑戰與機遇的交叉說明，以及加強其在全球教育生態系統中的國際形象與存在的建議

**关键词：**宗教教育機構、國際學生、跨文化了解、社會經濟影響

### 1. Introduction

International education is currently competitive, and countries (from all corners of the globe) are seeking to sell their schools as options for international students. International student admittance could also be the key to Indonesia with its wide range of religions and cultures that are still underdeveloped, especially for religious schools. Indonesia has a number of educational institutions, from Islamic, Christian, and Hindu schools to Buddhist schools, a phenomenon that makes Indonesia have a unique position. The growth of such international students in these schools serves not only the strategic interests of Indonesia, but also aligns with the developing global demand for religious and intercultural awareness.

### 2. Literature Review

A literature review acts as a cornerstone of research in academia and is a timeframe for pre-existing data, theories, and findings of interest. A literature review can be beneficial in several ways within the context of this study. Not only does it help to position the research in the context of existing academic conversation, but it also highlights the literature deficiencies, demonstrates the importance of the study, and suggests future research avenues. The focus of the literature review is to synthesize the existing scholarship on a subject and present it logically. This also includes reflecting on past research, theories, and methodologies and acknowledges their strengths and weaknesses.

When it comes to the Internationalization of Higher Education, the literature review is a pivotal element in comprehending global influences on traditional education at the local level. Therefore, even if institutions are mainly trying to recruit international students, turning their attention toward the global in their quest for a financially secure future, it is important to know both regions and countries, which will have an influence. In the guide of existing literature, researchers are able to capture all the principles and a broad way of the phenomenon of internationalization, as it provides a pathway to advance the diverse student groups and improve the quality of the education being given.

### 3. Theoretical Frameworks

Theory of Internationalization of Higher Education: This article draws from theories pertaining to the internationalization of higher education or how institutions change to consider prospective international students and improve their global positioning (Altbach, P. G., & Knight, J. 2007). This model can help explain the strategies that Indonesian religious educational institutions can adopt to make them more attractive and competitive in the global education market. Offering a wider selection of international programs, for example, partnering with universities in other components of the world. Internationalization adds to the host country's social and economic development beyond individual institutions. In addition to diversifying their campuses, bringing in international students can increase consumption and generate jobs in the local economy. Cross-pollination of different cultural identities fosters greater intercultural understanding, contributing to the

cultural enrichment of students' learning experiences. Maintain a proper literature review: Summing up a proper literature review is a very useful tool for researchers and educators. Not only does this position research the academic landscape of the Internationalization of Higher Education, but it also emphasizes the importance of the role that religious educational institutions may serve to facilitate a competitive and culturally relevant academic environment. Therefore, this article aims to set the stage for future research that builds on the insights and practical implications of this influence on international students and their contribution to socioeconomic development.

## 4. Result and Discussion

### 4.1 Explanation of Results and Key Findings of the Research Article

This article examines the current landscape of religious education in Indonesia and its potential benefits and challenges as well as the strategic steps that can be taken to enhance international students' experiences. Understanding the key results and findings of this research will be elaborated in the next section, which will highlight the implications of the research to Indonesian educational institutions as well as socio-economic contexts.

#### 4.1.1 The Situation of Religious Education in Indonesia.

Indonesia has thousands of religious educational institutions, mostly Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist. It has more than 700 Islamic higher education institutions including state universities (UIN), state institutes (IAIN), and state colleges (STAIN).

##### Key Findings:

- **Diverse Infrastructure:** This research shows the diversity of Indonesia's religious educational institutions, which serve various religious backgrounds and have diverse programs. The variety of worldviews among Indonesian universities will become the basic asset for education diversity, because Indonesia is strategically cultured to be the center of education from the world, especially from students who want to learn religious studies and intercultural dialogue.

- **Historical Context:** History focuses on the article that highlights Indonesia's journey of religious pluralism and moderation, which will mold its educational policies and practices. This historical context is important to understand the appeal of Indonesian religious institutions to international students.

#### 4.1.2. Worldwide Interest in Religious Instruction

The global need for a diverse, progressive, and peace-promotion-focused educational approach (religious or otherwise), and we argue that students across the world, especially in Muslim countries, as well as scholars interested in Southeast Asian religious cultures, would benefit enormously from studying in Indonesia. Indonesia has a long history of religious pluralism and moderation, and is ideally placed to teach the world about it.

One way forward is for Indonesian religious institutions — operating within global networks of education — to harness a desire the world ever more has when it comes to solving conflicts around religious concerns and heading in the direction of interfaith dialogue. Indonesia has been a melting pot of religions, home to Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism for centuries.

Other Islamic universities that have a long history of fostering future scholars capable of internal interreligious dialogue are UIN and IAIN. Doing so enables international students to obtain a diverse, immersive academic experience that would be difficult to find elsewhere.

#### 4.1.3. Tangible and Intangible Cultural and Religious Heritage

In fact, Indonesia ranks very high in terms of the tangible and intangible cultural and religious heritage that the country has to offer, alongside their unique history of moderation, tolerance, and religious diversity in which students can immerse themselves, where faith can be practiced and understood in the context of a plural society.

For students interested in examining the role of religion in shaping social mores, legal grounds, and systems of government in the world's third largest democracy, this is an especially tempting environment.

#### 4.1.4. International Standing for Moderation

Indonesia has developed an international reputation as the base for moderate Islam. Both Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah contribute to improving the education system in that they provide an alternative narrative to extremist groups. Marketed abroad, this reputation could appeal to students from countries struggling with religious extremism but craving education that fosters religious coexistence.

### Key Findings:

- **Magnet for Muslim Countries:** It also emphasizes that students from Muslim-majority countries — and those seeking to learn about religious cultures in Southeast Asia — will be greatly benefiting, by studying in Indonesia. Its emphasis on moderate Islam and commitment to religious tolerance makes it an attractive destination.

- **Filling a Global Gap:** Indonesian religious institutions are well positioned to address the gap in global demand for religious education that emphasizes moderation and pluralism. This gives Indonesia an opportunity to polish its global credentials and influence them further.

### 4.1.5. Socio-Economic Advantages of Admitting International Students

This article discusses the socio-economic boon that Indonesia stands to gain by raising international student numbers in its religious educational institutes. These advantages extend beyond academia, benefit local economies, and promote global collaboration.

#### Key Findings:

- **Economic Contributions:** International students are important to the local economy in terms of tuition fees as well as housing and living expenses. International students provide economic growth and jobs in economic sectors, including housing, hospitality, and retail.

- **Global Alumni Network:** The creation of a global alumni network can strengthen Indonesia's diplomatic and academic relations with other countries. It can also enhance Indonesia's research collaboration, cultural exchange, and partnerships with international organizations, which will further advance Indonesia as part of a global education network.

The presence of international students has a beneficial effect on improving the academic quality and international reputation of Indonesian religious educational institutions. From an academic standpoint, interactions between local and international students can facilitate the migration of knowledge, resulting in rich academic environments.

#### Key Findings:

- **Academic Quality Enhancement:** International students bring with them alternative worldviews and ideas. This not only leads to a livelier academic environment but also helps in refining the educational system as a whole.

- **Improving Global Rankings:** The growing appeal of Indonesian institutions to international students can lead to an improvement in global university rankings, increasing competitiveness in the world stage. This

increased visibility can lead to more faculties and resources.

### 4.1.6. Advancing Interfaith Dialogue and Cultural Awareness

The article emphasizes that Indonesian religious institutions serve as conductors of interfaith dialogue and cultural encounters. Indonesia's diverse religious landscape also allows students to be more than exposed to, but now interacts with other faith traditions through dialogue to highlight coexistence.

#### Key Findings:

- **Interfaith Dialogue Centers:** Indonesian religious educational institutions are good examples of implementing faith sensitivity and understanding. In a world with increasing conflicts between people with different beliefs, bringing diversity to these institutions can help overcome such situations by talking and solving.

- **Cultural Exchange:** International students can enhance cultural exchange in Indonesian society by fostering mutual respect and understanding between communities and cultures. It is a big addition to the construction of social cohesion and common prosperity for the general education of students.

### 4.1.7. Problems and the Ways Overcoming Them Language Barriers

**Language barrier:** This is one of the biggest challenges in attracting foreign students. Although there are many religious study programs held in Bahasa Indonesia, we need more of them in English, or a more common language. By adding more bilingual or English-taught programs, especially in fields such as religious studies, theology, and Islamic law, Indonesian institutions can become accessible to more international students.

- **Visa and Immigration Policies**

The visa and immigration policies of Indonesia should be simplified in a way that would facilitate international students studying in the country. This involves providing special packages for student visas and being transparent and efficient in the process. Scholarships and financial aid programs targeting international students would also make Indonesia a more attractive host for studying.

- **Religious global marketing and partnerships**

Institutions in Indonesia should focus on international marketing and engage in international partnerships with overseas universities. Multidegree arrangements, exchange programs, and joint research projects with international institutions would enhance the global image of Indonesian religious education, which would

have an immediate impact on the volume of student recruitment.

There are more than 700 Islamic higher education providers in Indonesia from 58 state Islamic universities and institutes under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Such institutions fall into three broad categories: *Universitas Islam Negeri* (UIN) (Islamic State Universities), which provide a variety of choices in both religious and non-religious fields. This group includes UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta, UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Malang. *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (IAIN) (The Islamic State Institute) is partially specialized in theology and Islamic Studies. Some IAINs are shifting into wider fields, such as *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri* (STAIN), a state Islamic college that provides Islamic education and teacher training.

Many of these institutions either have already run international courses or have the potential to do so. For example, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah has initiated graduate programs in English, and many are looking to lure students from other Muslim-majority countries like Thailand Southern region, Malaysia and Middle East, and African countries with full and partial scholarships.

#### **Colleges and Universities with Christian Character**

There are many Christian schools in Indonesia, including universities, theological seminaries, and schools for Protestant and Catholic students. The Jakarta Theological Seminary (STT Jakarta) and *Universitas Kristen Indonesia* (UKI) are institutions that have achieved good academic recognition in theology. A few Christian institutions seek internationalization through English-language programs and partnerships with foreign churches and seminaries.

Hindu and Buddhist Organizations Indonesia, though lower in number, is home to a handful of Hindu and Buddhist schools in which instruction takes place, mainly on the island of Bali. Examples are *Institut Hindu Dharma Negeri* (IHDN) Denpasar and *Universitas Hindu Indonesia* (UNHI), which are known for religious studies or studies on culture. Buddhist institutions such as *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha Negeri* (STABN) in Raden Wijaya offer programs on learning Buddhist philosophy, and this has a high possibility of attracting international students, especially those from other Buddhist-based countries within Asia.

Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta has been one of the most active Islamic universities in the country in terms of internationalization. The university has several graduate programs in English, particularly Islamic Studies, Comparative Religion, and Interfaith Dialogue. It also has partnerships with universities in the Middle East

and Southeast Asia, aiming to become a center of international Islamic scholarship.

Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Sunan Ampel, Surabaya, East Java, and even opened an international class and facilitated student exchanges with many institutions, especially in Malaysia, Turkiye, and Middle East and African countries. It emphasizes Islamic law (Shariah) and other religious studies, attracting students worldwide to seek careers as religious leaders, lawyers, and educators.

The UKI is one of Indonesia's largest Christian Universities and is now starting to introduce programs for international students. Programs in theology and religious studies taught in English will also be developed to provide opportunities for students from other predominantly Christian countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe. International Link-ups: UKI's global charm is further complemented by collaborations with world seminaries and universities.

Institut Hindu Dharma Negeri (IHDN), Bali] as a center of Hindu culture and spirituality, possesses the potential to attract international students with its single leading Hindu educational institution. The IHDN has recently begun offering some programs (and speaks a little English) in subjects such as Hindu philosophy, Balinese culture, and religious tourism. This makes it a top destination for studying Hinduism and Asian spiritual traditions.

#### **4.1.8. Strategic Steps for Future Development**

This article concludes by outlining the strategic steps that Indonesian religious educational institutions can take to enhance their international appeal and attract more international students.

- **Improving Quality and Reputation:** Institutions should focus on enhancing the quality of education and their global reputation through strategic investments in faculty development, research initiatives, and infrastructure improvement.
- **Expanding International Programs:** There need for more international programs and partnerships, including dual-degree arrangements, exchange programs, and joint research projects. These initiatives can help bridge the gap between Indonesian institutions and the international academic community.
- **Creating Supportive Environments:** Developing supportive environments for international students, including orientation programs, cultural integration activities, and academic support services, is essential for ensuring positive experiences.

## 5. Conclusion

With their great contribution to producing the next generation of leaders, both in academia and in religious dictums, Indonesia's religious learning institutions have a huge potential to develop as ideal sources of learning resources victorious in the global market. Indonesia, which is one of the leading countries in higher education, is now at the forefront of an extraordinary opportunity to establish strong values of religious tolerance, academic excellence, and solid socioeconomic development. They can do this by widening the diversity within stakeholder representation through international students, who offer diverse perspectives that enrich the learning environment. The onus to lead this charge can rightly fall on these revered sovereign institutions, which can set the tone of courtesy for students regardless of their origins.

Turning this exciting vision to reality will require targeted investment in the areas of language access, visa facilitation, and international partnerships. Institutions must work to break down these barriers by improving language services so that they do not hinder international students, further developing these vital links between students, and facilitating their placement in the academic community. Easier entry through the simplification of visa norms at the outset would further enhance Indonesia as a destination for religious students.

Due to this unique position, Indonesia is a natural leader of moderate religious discourse in the developing world; thus, its institutions of higher learning are in an unparalleled position to rethink or reshape the future of religious education globally. By emphasizing intercultural understanding and dialogue, they can provide an example for other countries seeking peace and reconciliation.

The full research article goes in depth on the potential of international students to study in Indonesian religious schools. The implications emphasize that Indonesia holds a distinctive allure for the international student market, potentially ushering in a plethora of socioeconomic advantages, cultural exchanges, and intellectual progress stemming from the influx of international learners. Exposure to diverse cultures and thought processes enhances analytical thinking abilities and cultural fluency, which also prepares students for an increasingly interconnected world.

Such practices can place Indonesian religious institutions at the next level internationally. This commitment will help improve their educational offerings and play a role in promoting a more interconnected and understanding world. In fact, this research provides important insights as a frame of reference for policymakers and educational leaders in

Indonesia, along with contributions to wider similar discussions on the significance of integrating religious education in upholding peace and intercultural dialogue in an increasingly global society.

Looking at all the aspects discussed above, religious educational institutions in Indonesia are at the threshold of a breakthrough process that could change their influence, not only on the national stage, but also on international communities. These global universities help with socio-economic development by welcoming international students on their campus and making them feel comfortable on the campus, which strengthens their intercultural understanding.

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## Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization, W.H.; methodology, W.H.; software, W.H.; validation, S. M; formal analysis, S. M.; investigation, S. M; resources, Y.S., M.A.M.; data collection, Y.S., M.A.M; data curation, Y.S., M.A.M; writing—original draft preparation, all authors contributed equally; writing—review and editing, W.H.; visualization, Y.S.; supervision, Y.S.; project administration, W.H. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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