

# Phenomenology of Religious Thought in Public Universities in The Study of Sociology and Anthropology

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## Abstract

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### Keywords:

Religious  
Education;  
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Learning Media.

This study aims to examine the differences between religious education at the school and university levels, focusing on the curriculum, sources of religious knowledge, and the role of media in shaping students' religious understanding. The research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing document analysis and interviews with students at Lambung Mangkurat University (ULM) in Banjarmasin. The findings reveal that university-level religious education in Islamic studies deepens students' understanding of religious concepts, emphasizing moral and spiritual aspects. The study also highlights the pivotal role of parents in instilling religious values from an early age and the significant influence of social media, with Ustadz Adi Hidayat being a popular religious figure among students. Moreover, ULM students predominantly possess a textualist scripturalist understanding of religious diversity, primarily focusing on exoteric-shariah aspects. The research contributes to discussions on the dynamics of religious education and the diverse sources shaping students' religious knowledge.

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## Abstrak

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Kata kunci:  
Pendidikan  
Agama;  
Kurikulum;  
Media  
Pembelajaran.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perbedaan antara pendidikan agama di tingkat sekolah dan universitas, dengan fokus pada kurikulum, sumber pengetahuan agama, dan peran media dalam membentuk pemahaman agama mahasiswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menerapkan analisis dokumen dan wawancara dengan mahasiswa Universitas Lambung Mangkurat (ULM) di Banjarmasin. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa pendidikan agama tingkat universitas dalam studi Islam mendalami pemahaman mahasiswa terhadap konsep-konsep agama, dengan menekankan aspek moral dan spiritual. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti peran penting orang tua dalam menanamkan nilai-nilai agama sejak usia dini serta pengaruh signifikan media sosial, dengan Ustadz Adi Hidayat menjadi tokoh agama populer di kalangan mahasiswa. Selain itu, mayoritas mahasiswa ULM memiliki pemahaman teksualis skripturalis tentang keragaman agama, dengan fokus utama pada aspek eksoterik-syar'iyah. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskusi mengenai dinamika pendidikan agama dan berbagai sumber yang membentuk pengetahuan agama mahasiswa.

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## INTRODUCTION

The study of religious thought among students in public universities within the fields of sociology and anthropology is crucial due to its multidimensional significance (Baharun, Wahid, Muali, Rozi, & Fajry, 2022; Umar, Munadi, Aminuddin, & Sulistyono, 2023). This research intends to contribute both quantitatively and qualitatively to this area of study. Existing literature, including studies by Bråten (2009) and Rockenbach, Walker, & Luzader (2012), has explored aspects of religious thought in academic settings. Smith examined the link between early religious education and university-level religious knowledge, while Johnson emphasized the role of educators, parents, and social media in shaping religious understanding during students' university years (O'Sullivan, 2020; Satriawati, Rokhman, Saputra, Anggraini, & Abou-Samra, 2023). However, these studies provide only partial insights, leaving gaps in understanding the complex interplay of factors influencing religious thought among students in public universities.

The specific aim of this paper is to address these gaps by conducting comprehensive research at Lambung Mangkurat University (ULM). We seek to understand how educational backgrounds, formal education, and external influences collectively impact students' religious knowledge and understanding. This research's unique focus lies in its endeavor to fill the existing void in the literature regarding the multifaceted nature of religious thought among university students.

This paper's primary objective is to contribute new perspectives and insights to the study of religious thought in public universities, offering a more holistic view of the phenomenon. By examining the nuances of religious education, understanding, and experiences, we aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how students navigate religious thought within academic settings. The central hypothesis being tested is whether religious education and experiences significantly influence students' religious knowledge and understanding, ultimately enriching our understanding of the interplay between education and faith in public universities.

In summary, this research seeks to explore the multidimensional aspects of religious thought among students at Lambung Mangkurat University. By addressing gaps in the existing literature, it aims to provide valuable insights into the development of religious knowledge and understanding in public university contexts, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The approach used is a qualitative approach. Adlini et al. (2022) stated that the term qualitative method is a research method with the results of data descriptions in the form of written and spoken words from various people, as well as behaviors that can be observed. This approach is oriented to the historical background of a particular person holistically.

In terms of qualitative research, it was originally based on qualitative observation as opposed to quantitative. In quantitative observation, research involves measuring the level of certain characteristics (Fadli, 2021). To get results, the observer needs to know the characteristics of the object. For that, the observer starts counting or recording from one to the next. On the other hand, quality indicates the natural aspect as opposed to number or quantity. Based on these basic considerations, qualitative research is defined as research that does not perform calculations. Meanwhile, this type of research uses phenomenological research. (Sidiq, Ag, & Choiri, 2019), explains phenomenology, namely: 1) phenomenological-experience or subjective experience; 2) a study of a person's consciousness seen from the main point of view.

This research, when viewed from the scope of its research, falls into the category of grand theory, which is a theory in which it is tested through historical explanations, social life and human experience. Basically, this theory contradicts the theory of positivism, empiricism, or perspectives that explain that definitions will only be used to study society, facts and phenomena.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

Table 1 Key Findings

Aspect of Religious Thought	Key Findings
<b>Knowledge</b>	Religious knowledge influenced by education background, especially early religious education. Increased religious education positively correlates with better religious knowledge.
<b>Understanding</b>	Lack of comprehensive religious understanding among Muslim students. Evolution of understanding during college years with guidance from educators and parents.
<b>Experience</b>	Personal experience shape religious beliefs. Religious experiences integral to spiritual journey. Active engagement with religious teaching is essential for religious experiences.

Source: Processed by Researcher

### *Knowledge*

Knowledge, as defined by the Big Indonesian Dictionary Language Center, encompasses everything that is known and can be related to material or lessons. Religion, referred to as "Din" in Arabic and "religion" in English, holds a significant place in human understanding. Romli Mubarak defines religious knowledge as encompassing beliefs in deities and the associated practices and obligations. Additionally, C.Y. Glock

and R. Stark identify religious knowledge as the dimension that measures an individual's familiarity with their religion's teachings.

### ***Understanding***

Understanding distinguishes itself from knowledge by delving deeper into the structure of the object being studied. Unlike knowledge, which relies on sensory perception, understanding involves a detailed description of the subject matter. Unfortunately, many Muslims tend to lack comprehensive religious understanding, often superficially identifying with their faith. This leads to issues such as radicalism and terrorism, which are against the principles of Islam. Max Weber's concept of "Verstehen" highlights the importance of a clear and true understanding of religious beliefs in achieving personal success.

Religious understanding among students at Lambung Mangkurat University indicates room for improvement. While students may not have acquired extensive religious knowledge during their high school years, they start to develop a deeper understanding of religion through the learning process in college. Moreover, religious understanding further evolves with the guidance of lecturers, parents, and exposure to religious content on platforms like YouTube, featuring preachers like Ustadz Abdul Somad and Ustadz Adi Hidayat. However, students' limited engagement with religion impacts their understanding.

### ***Experience***

Personal experiences shape an individual's personality and religious beliefs. Zakiah Darajat highlights that life experiences, from birth onwards, constitute the building blocks of one's personality, including religious experiences. Religious experiences encompass events related to faith, such as answered prayers, a sense of closeness to God, and fear of sin. These experiences are integral to one's spiritual journey.

Religious experiences are intimately tied to one's practice of their faith. Without active engagement with religious teachings, it becomes challenging to gain religious experiences. Joachim Wach emphasizes that religious experiences reflect the inner connection between an individual's mind and God. To explore religious experiences, two approaches can be used: historical descriptions of religious traditions and examining individuals' personal and collective experiences.

In summary, religious experiences are inherent in human life and play a vital role in shaping individuals' religious beliefs. These experiences are characterized by their response to what is perceived as an absolute reality, their holistic nature encompassing thoughts, emotions, and will, their intensity surpassing other human experiences, and their manifestation in actions as a primary source of motivation.

### ***Practical Implications***

The findings of this research emphasize the need for practical interventions to enhance religious understanding and knowledge among students at Lambung Mangkurat University. A targeted approach that integrates religious education within the university environment, encourages regular exploration of religion, and provides

guidance through experienced educators and mentors can significantly contribute to improving religious understanding and fostering a more comprehensive knowledge of faith among students.

## **Discussion**

### *Knowledge*

Comparison of religious education in schools with religious education in universities is very different because it refers more to the existing curriculum. This is in accordance with the religious education launched by the government, namely the existence of Islamic religious education in public universities is not only a course that students must learn, but also the realization of educational goals as summarized by the National Education System, namely human beings who believe and fear God Almighty and are virtuous (Agus, Juliadharna, & Djamaluddin, 2023; Fidayani & Ammar, 2023; Muhammad, Alias, Jamaludin, & Zulnaidi, 2022). PAI is expected to have an impact on the realization of a quality, creative, and productive society, and is based on faith and devotion to Allah SWT. In addition, in addition to the religious enrichment of the lecturer concerned is ideal, PAI material in college is also better because it is more dominant in discussing religious life (Akyildiz & Carlson, 2014). Basically, the religious education curriculum at school and in college has differences that adjust to the established curriculum, where the religious education curriculum in college is a continuation of religious education in school and more to the deepening of religious material and understanding. As said by (Umiarso & Muhammad Qorib, 2022), that judging from the way of learning between at the school level and at the college level, it is very clear that there are many differences. This is due to - among other things - differences in the learning atmosphere, environment, strategies, and the form of tasks given. Thus, the learning system in higher education and the learning system in schools - whether at the secondary or primary level - cannot be equated (Kan, 2009).

This opinion is in line with the opinion of Sites, Garzon, Milacci, & Boothe (2009) who argued that the learning process for students in higher education should be distinguished from the learning process for students in secondary schools." Likewise, the PAI learning system in general universities must be distinguished from the PAI learning system in religious universities in terms of concept, planning, management, curriculum structure, and other policies related to PAI learning. This is because the implementation and provision of PAI learning in general universities is only done merely to fulfill the obligations of the curriculum load.

The tendency of students' religious knowledge at Lambung Mangkurat University Banjarmasin is guided by the Qur'an and Hadith. This shows that the Islamic religious education taught is guided by the original source texts, namely the Qur'an and Hadith because they are the two main materials that guide Muslims in carrying out life to achieve happiness in the world and in the hereafter (Riinawati, 2022; Sudarmaji & Maarif, 2021). In the teachings of Islam, the two reference guidelines for Muslims, namely the Qur'an and hadith, are absolute things to be used as guidelines because they

are the core of the teachings of Islam itself which must be held by all Muslims in undergoing religious rituals and living life (Burns, 2014).

Coupled with following religious enrichment in non-formal as in the taklim assembly which is routinely followed. As formulated at the deliberation of the Jakarta Ta'lim Assembly held on July 9-10, 1980, it was explained that the Ta'lim Assembly is a non-formal Islamic educational institution that has its own curriculum, is held regularly and regularly, is attended by relatively many worshipers, and aims to foster and develop a polite and harmonious relationship between man and Allah SWT, between man and his fellow man, and man and his environment, in order to foster a society that is devoted to Allah SWT. Then because majelis taklim not only enriches religious knowledge but also has a social and recreational function that can add potential to community development. In addition to schools, religious education can also be obtained in religious institutions in the community such as taklim assemblies which have the function of adding knowledge and religious beliefs that will provide experience and lessons in religious teachings for students (Reiter, 2006).

The majority of students at Lambung Mangkurat University obtain religious knowledge in addition to school also through the help of parents because parents have a very important role in instilling religion from an early age to children and affect their future. Where the success of children depends on the guidance and diligence of their parents, as well as how strong the belief (religion) is instilled in their children. Therefore, it is from parents who shape children into individuals who are knowledgeable, have good morals, and have life skills (Ferrin, 2018). Because parents have a responsibility towards their children in terms of care, maintenance and education of children, in this case Islamic teachings formulate it as follows. 1) Responsibility for the education and nurturing of the faith. 2) Responsibility for education and moral development. 3) Responsibility for the maintenance of children's health. 4) Responsibility for education and intellectual development.

In the description above, it is described that religious education is greatly influenced by education from the family environment, namely parents who instill from an early age so that religious education sticks well in changing their personality.

In this day and age, the role of the media in broadcasting religion has raised people's interest in learning religion. This is what causes many of the Lambung Mangkurat University students to follow religious recitations in the media, both electronic and print media and social media. We know that the media is anything that is used to distribute information. In addition, there are also those who interpret that the media is a tool used to channel messages and information from the message sender to the message receiver (Adetoro & Okike, 2022). There are also those who give the meaning that the media is a channel of information. But following the routine recitation in the media has both positive and negative impacts, for the positive impact can enrich the treasury of religious knowledge while the negative impact of the media can lead to things that are not in line with Islam (Tuohy, Cooney, Dowling, Murphy, & Sixsmith, 2013).

As said, another positive impact of social media is the rapid spread of information. However, there are also negative effects of social media, namely the reduction of direct face-to-face or inter-personal interaction, the emergence of addiction that exceeds the limit or over dose, as well as ethical and legal problems because of its substance that violates privacy, morals, and regulations. Therefore, it is necessary to direct media that is only in line with Islam and make it a tool for the improvement and guidance of the ummah, namely by establishing an Islamic information center, which is a lot of Islamic media in this day and age (Hylén, 2014).

The thing that makes the media part of religious education because the media has a very significant role because the media is easily accessible and quickly obtains information but has a negative impact that can affect the mindset towards which is not justified by religion because the information conveyed sometimes refers to the source of Islamic teachings, namely the Qur'an and hadith (Fata, Hakam, Somad, & Ruyadi, 2023).

In the media, the ustadz who is watched by many Lambung Mangkurat University students is like Ustadz Adi Hidayat. In this case, it shows that students' religious interest is actually very enthusiastic because they basically look for role models from various media to study religion such as Ustadz Adi Hidayat who is in great demand by most young people because of the use of polite and good language and the religious information conveyed is also more up to date and more fun. Apart from electronic and print media, Lambung Mangkurat University students also use social media such as WA, Instagram and Youtube in accessing religion. Because social media is now more booming and easily accessible than other media so that all groups including students will easily see religious material directly through the help of the cellphones they have. This is what makes social media a lot of help in student religiosity because of the ease of access through a handphone that has an internet connection and is always carried everywhere. Therefore, it needs to be a reflection of all of us to think about strategies on how to build the power of da'wah in social media to bridge various consultations or discussions on religious issues that require the right answer (convincing) and in accordance with religious guidance. As religious educators, we should think about how to direct it in line with Islamic teachings because we know that social media contains a lot of religious information but is not always accompanied by a good explanation so that sometimes many people misunderstand it (Fordyce, 2007).

Then in terms of updating religious knowledge, the average Lambung Mangkurat University student always updates it, this shows that they know the importance of updating religious knowledge for the provision of happiness in the world and the hereafter. Because updating it can foster introspection and prudence in managing issues and differences in religious groups in Islam. The importance of updating religious knowledge is not only to add religious insight but also to keep oneself from religious issues that are now widely used by other people who are not responsible for their interests by utilizing other people in seeking support (Cush & Robinson, 2014).

The search for religious truth is very necessary to do because a lot of information on religious knowledge is not in accordance with the guidelines of Islamic teachings

such as the Qur'an, hadith and Ijtihad. Not only Islamic teachings but all religions have the same view of rejecting religious searches based on reason and reason. At Lambung Mangkurat University students, they stated that they had traced the truth of the learned religious knowledge and proved it. This is in accordance with the guidance of Islamic teachings which prohibit blind taqlid, namely following the imam of a madzhab fanatically, even though the madzhab imam is wrong.

Furthermore, the majority of Lambung Mangkurat University students who have preferred religious figures but are not accompanied by reading Islamic books as a vehicle to add insight into knowledge. Whereas according to Dewa Ketut Sukardi, when reading a book, it is required to repeat it many times so that a pattern of reading habits is formed. The habit of reading will eventually lead to an interest in reading.

Based on the description of the analysis above, it shows that the findings of this study regarding the religious knowledge of ULM students are dominant in the exoteric-syar'iyah aspects, which are more Fiqhiyah and only a little to the theological level. Sufistic aspects get less touch in the religious studies of ULM students and less animated in religious behavior. This is seen from the source of religious knowledge they obtained before entering college such as at school and through social media so that it only touches on the exoteric-syar'iyah aspect (Sim, 2011).

Based on these findings, it shows that student religiosity rejects the theory of (Umiarso & Muhammad Qorib, 2022) which explains that religious knowledge (the knowlegde dimension) describes the extent to which a person knows about the teachings of his religion. Namely not only in the fiqhiyah aspect but also other aspects. In addition, it also rejects Wandenburg's theory quoted by Zuhri regarding the meaning and scope of Islamic Studies as follows.

Islamic Studies encompasses the study of the religion of Islam and the Islamic aspects of Muslim societies and cultures. .... On the basis of the above distinction, it is possible to identify three different patterns of work that fall within the general sphere of Islamic Studies. First, the normative study of Islam is generally developed by Muslim scholars to gain knowledge of religious truths. This includes religious studies on Islam, such as Qur'anic exegesis, hadith science, jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic theology (Kalam Science). It usually develops in mosques or religious schools (madrasah). Usually, in Islamic universities or institutes in Muslim countries, the above fields are included in the study of shari'ah, the basic science of religion (ushul ad-din). This is noteworthy because, after all, these normative studies are also pursued by non-Muslims, such as Christian intellectuals who draw themselves into the Muslim world or to construct a religious theology within the specific space set out in Islam. Second, non-normative studies of Islam. Usually, these studies are conducted in universities in the form of a deeper exploration of what has been studied by Islam so that it becomes a religious teaching in Islam and what continues to develop in Islam so that it becomes something that lives dynamically in the form of factual expressions of Muslim religion. Non-normative studies like this are also carried out by both Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals, where they try to make observations with the general rules that exist in

scientific research, which are then often referred to as Islamic studies. Third, non-normative studies on various aspects of Islam related to Muslim culture and society. In a broader scope, this study is not directly related to Islam as a norm. These studies take a fairly broad range of contexts, approaching Islam from the viewpoint of history, literature, or sociology and cultural anthropology, and not only focusing on one perspective, namely religious studies.

The information above shows that the main study of Islamic teachings includes three things, namely: 1) normative studies: such as interpretation of the Qur'an, hadith science, jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic theology (Kalam Science); 2) non-normative studies: these studies are carried out in universities in the form of digging deeper into what has been studied by Islam; and 3) non-normative studies: a fairly broad range of contexts, approaching Islam from the point of view of history, literature, or sociology and cultural anthropology, and not only focusing on one perspective.

### *Understanding*

Based on the description above, it shows that the research findings regarding the understanding of diversity of ULM students tend to be textualist scripturalist. The understanding of naqliyah basics is limited to textual understanding (not yet entering the substantive and Sufistic areas). The textualist understanding is enriched with rationalistic understanding with little use of scientific logic according to the level of scientific capacity possessed. This understanding of diversity is obtained through intra- and extra-campus experiences or obtained navigatively (Kafle, 2013).

The findings above reject Max Weber's theory that states the process of social change is due to individual religious understanding in society is closely related to the development of human rationality. The development of rationality in humans also penetrates into various social dimensions, one of which is religion. According to Weber, rationalization in Protestant religion then played a key role in the emergence of a rational economic system, namely capitalism (Aliani, Alam, Rofiq, & Srinio, 2023; Murharyana, Ayyubi, Rohmatulloh, & Suryana, 2023). Weber calls it Protestant ethics. According to him, religion is a source of progressive spirit for humans, because in it there are many doctrines or teachings that influence the way of thinking of its followers. This understanding of religion then gave birth to a progressive and progress-oriented process of social change. Based on this description, it explains that different points of view are sought where the understanding of religion according to Max Weber tends to give rise to a source of progressive spirit for humans and cause social change (Ali, 2019).

But these findings support the theory of Ibn Khaldun which states that understanding will turn on creativity so that it can solve problems and be good at respecting others and understanding and understanding what it learns not to intellectualists (Islam, 2009). In addition, these findings also support the theory of Ali Shari'ati that religious understanding is very important to raise humanity, individuals and communities to understand Islam based on the Qur'an and hadith. Then reject the theory of Nasarudin Rozak quoted by Abuddin Nata which states that understanding Islam is integral, according to him there are four ways to understand Islam, namely:

First, Islam must be learned from the original sources, namely the Qur'an and hadith. Second, Islam must be studied integrally, not in a partial way. Third, Islam is studied from literature written by great scholars, *zuama'* and Islamic scholars, because they are all considered to have a good understanding of Islam. Fourth, Islam should be studied from the normative theological provisions in the Qur'an, and then connected with the historical, empirical and sociological realities that exist in society (Bromley, 2004).

### *Experience*

The religious experience gained by Lambung Mangkurat University students has been obtained since school, namely by studying religion and applying religion in everyday life because the benefits of religious experience can increase faith. The source of religious experience is obtained from teachers and parents. Plus the help of television and social media (Natsis, 2017).

In Wach in Abdullah (2020) perspective, religious experiences can be categorized into four distinct types. Firstly, a religious experience is often characterized as a response to what is perceived as an absolute reality, an encompassing force that governs and shapes everything in existence. This response goes beyond mere acknowledgment; it involves a deep understanding and interpretation of this absolute reality (Bakar, Umroh, & Hameed, 2023).

Secondly, religious experiences are considered comprehensive in nature, involving the entirety of a person's being. It goes beyond mere thoughts and feelings; it encompasses the complete individual, reflecting the idea that religion is intricately linked with the entirety of human life and existence.

Thirdly, these experiences are often described as being "deep." They possess a profound and powerful quality that can leave a lasting impact on individuals. This depth is evident not only in one's words and thoughts but also in their actions, reflecting the profound influence of religious experiences on a person's life.

Lastly, a pure religious experience extends beyond contemplation and introspection. It translates into action, serving as a potent source of motivation that drives an individual's actions with unwavering conviction. In this way, a pure religious experience becomes a guiding force that shapes and directs a person's life.

From the results of the above explanation, it can be concluded that the types of religious experience include: a response to what is lived as an absolute reality, a comprehensive response, a deep response, and a pure nature.

The findings of ULM students' religiosity are dominantly formed by religious learning experiences through mentoring activities and extracurricular student religious activities, not formed and influenced by the effects of formal PAI learning in lectures. This finding supports the theory of Joachim Wach which states that religious experience is an inner aspect of the mutual relationship between man and his mind with God such as increasing the faith of ULM Banjarmasin students.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the comparison between religious education in schools and universities reveals distinct differences rooted in their respective curricula and educational goals. While school-level religious education serves as a foundational introduction, university-level Islamic religious education goes beyond mere course requirements, aiming to shape individuals who believe, fear God, and embody virtuous qualities. The curriculum at universities delves deeper into religious concepts, emphasizing the spiritual and moral aspects of Islamic life. However, the methodologies, learning environments, and instructional strategies greatly diverge between these educational levels, underscoring the unique nature of higher education in fostering a more mature understanding of religion.

The influence of various sources on religious knowledge acquisition among Lambung Mangkurat University (ULM) students is noteworthy. Family plays a pivotal role in instilling religious values and beliefs from a young age, shaping students' perspectives and contributing to their overall understanding of faith. Moreover, the role of media, particularly social media, has surged in importance. While it offers rapid information dissemination and access to religious content, its dual nature—both enriching religious knowledge and possibly disseminating erroneous interpretations—needs careful navigation. The popularity of religious figures like Ustadz Adi Hidayat highlights the impact of charismatic and relatable religious figures in shaping students' interest in religious teachings.

Furthermore, the research underscores that ULM students predominantly exhibit a textualist scripturalist understanding of religious diversity. While their religious knowledge encompasses various dimensions, the majority of students tend to focus more on exoteric-syar'iyah aspects rather than deeper theological or Sufistic understandings. This highlights the importance of fostering a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of Islam. Despite rejecting some existing theories, the findings align with the idea that religious knowledge is a dynamic force, responsive to various sources such as mentorship, formal education, and media consumption. This recognition serves as a call for balanced approaches that draw from multiple avenues to enhance students' religious knowledge and appreciation of diversity.

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