

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS CENTRE IN MONASH UNIVERSITY: Perspective of Three Indonesian Muslim Students

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the perspective of three Indonesian Muslim students at Monash University concerning the availability of Religious Centre which facilitates some aspects of students' spiritual inquiry. This study deals with the primary data through observation and semi-structured interviews as qualitative research. This research reveals that Religious Centre has a significant role in fulfilling students' spiritual needs, including the prayer room for Muslim students, and also fosters students' tolerance by putting prayer rooms for all religions in the same building. The university students found that Religious Centre is significant in preserving their religiosity and relieving them to perform prayers inside the campus. Likewise, it has eased students in managing academic challenges. In addition, this study found that Religious Centre has contributed to maintaining the religiosity of three Indonesian Muslim students: helping them cheering educational challenges and controlling their academic stresses.

Keywords: Academic stress; international students; Indonesian Muslim student; multireligious culture; religiosity.

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Introduction

Education is a significant aspect of improving the capacity of human resources. In Indonesia, several efforts have been pursued to enhance the capacity of the young generation. Some scholarships, such as *Beasiswa Unggulan* from the Ministry of Education, *Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan* (LPDP: Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education), and *5000 Doktor* from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, can be achieved. Studying abroad can enhance students' knowledge and capability at the international level. The young generation can also build their intercultural competencies through their engagement with other international students.¹ It creates opportunities to be internationally engaged with global issues but nationally ingrained to solve the local problems in Indonesia.

Until today, LPDP has funded 27,995 Indonesian students from 2013 to 2020,² and 22.3% of students are studying in more than 19 different countries. Most Indonesian students are Muslim and will be a religious minority when studying at universities in Europe or Australia. The prayer room eventually becomes an issue for Indonesian Muslim students, particularly those who prefer to spend much time on campus, as they have to pray five times a day.

Some researchers found that students' religiosity can reduce academic stress. During the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, most students experienced academic stress due to the changes in the teaching and learning process, from face-to-face to distance learning (online). Religiosity is crucial in reducing academic stress. Pious students can control stress more efficiently³ as they can also manage depression.⁴ On the other hand, international students at Monash University are also close to acculturative stress, such as the challenges to English skills ability, discrimination, and loneliness which can lead

¹ Gita Maharaja, "The Impact of Study Abroad on College Students' Intercultural Competence and Personal Development," *International Research and Review: Journal of Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars* 7, no. 2 (2018).

² Ibid.

³ Hadi Pajarianto et al., "Talent Development & Excellence Study from Home in the Middle of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analysis of Religiosity, Teacher, and Parents Support Against Academic Stress" 12, no. 2s (2020): 1791–1807, accessed July 22, 2022, <http://www.iratde.com>.

⁴ Evanthia Sakellari et al., "Exploring Religiosity, Self-Esteem, Stress, and Depression Among Students of a Cypriot University," *Journal of religion and health* 57, no. 1 (February 1, 2018): 136–145, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28484933/>.

to academic stress.⁵ Providing international Muslim students with a prayer room on campus can support them in performing obligatory prayers considering that by carrying out their obligation, they also maintain the dimensions of their religiosity. This dimension in Islam is called *sharia* which refers to the level of Muslim compliance in carrying out worship prescribed and recommended by Islam.⁶ Therefore, the availability of the place for worship in universities is crucial in supporting Indonesian Muslims when studying in countries where Muslims are the minority.

Some universities do not provide a place of worship for every religion, specifically for the minority. Three universities in Scandinavia, and Northern Europe, offer silent rooms for Muslim. However, Muslim students tend to be forced to pray individually since it could be noisy if carried out in the congregation.⁷ The prayer space is a prominent need of international Muslim students, while some universities only focus on fulfilling students' academic needs but ignore their spiritual needs.⁸

This condition contrasts with the availability of prayer rooms for international Muslim students at Monash University, Australia. Based on the annual report of LPDP, 193 Indonesian students graduated from Monash University, which places it as one of the top 5 destination universities.⁹ According to the education aspect, Monash University is the second-best campus in Australia, which has become the main reason many Indonesian students choose it. The university has the largest campus in Australia, and international students come from over 170 countries worldwide.¹⁰

⁵ Eman S. Alharbi and Andrew P. Smith, "Review of the Literature on Stress and Wellbeing of International Students in English-Speaking Countries," *International Education Studies* 11, no. 6 (May 29, 2018): 22.

⁶ Djamaluddin Ancok and Fuad Nashori Suroso, *Psikologi Islami: Solusi Islam Atas Problem-Problem Psikologi*, Cet. 2. (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1995).

⁷ Henrik Reintoft Christensen et al., "Rooms of Silence at Three Universities in Scandinavia," *Sociology of Religion: A Quarterly Review* 80, no. 3 (August 20, 2019): 299–322.

⁸ Bateer Chen, Humaira Tabassum, and Muhammad Aamir Saeed, "International Muslim Students: Challenges and Practical Suggestions to Accommodate Their Needs on Campus" 9, no. 4 (2019): 2166–3750.

⁹ Kementerian keuangan, "LPDP - Scholarship General Policy."

¹⁰ monash University, "Monash University - One of the Top Universities in Australia," accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.monash.edu/>.

Monash university is unique as it has a Religious Centre for all religions. Based on my direct observation, the Religious Centre has several prayer rooms; two adjoining rooms are provided for Muslim students, one for males and one for females. Prayer rooms of other religions are closed because all worshipping rooms are on the same floor; to some extent, the room for Christian students is placed precisely in front of the Muslim prayer rooms. This uniqueness is vital in promoting religious tolerance, seeing that the phenomenon is in line with the Religious Moderation that is nowadays campaigned by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs as rooted in the values of Islam and practiced by local society in Indonesia.¹¹

Studies concerning international Muslim students' academic stress and learning achievement are widely available, as described previously. At the same time, research on the universities that provide a place for worship for every religion is still rare. Therefore, this study aimed to identify the effectiveness of Monash University's Religious Centre by exploring Indonesian Muslim students' perspectives. The perspectives are related to the benefits of having a prayer room and the challenges of praying on the same floor as other religions. It also explores students' religiosity and identifies the relationship between religiosity and academic stress. This research used a qualitative approach using a semi-structured interview to collect the data. The research participants were three Indonesian Muslim students, two females and one male, studying at Monash University using a scholarship and have prayed in Religious Centre. The researcher selected Indonesian Muslim students as the research subjects because they were the minority in this university and were close to discrimination.

Religious Centre of Monash University, Australia

As the largest university in Australia, Monash University has six campuses, namely the Clayton campus, Caulfield campus, Peninsula campus, Parkville campus, Law Chambers, and 750 Collins Street. Clayton is the largest one that offers eight faculties. Every year, over 3000 students study on this campus. As an international university, students come from more than 170 countries with different

¹¹ Kementerian Agama, "Moderasi Beragama", accessed September 20, 2022, https://adminku.kemenag.go.id/public/data/files/users/5/MODERASI_BERAGAMA.pdf

backgrounds. Thus, diversities among students exist and color daily life within the university.¹²

Clayton campus provides several facilities to meet the various needs of its students, particularly international students. Religious Centre is the most iconic service since it is only available on this campus. The considerable number and diversity of students on this campus could be the main reason for providing a prayer place for all students of religions. However, according to history, Religious Centre was not built and founded by Monash University. However, the Christian and Jewish communities proposed a place where all student from different religious background could use in Monash University. They raised funds and donated the building to campus to avoid particular religious interests.¹³

Currently, many students with various backgrounds of religions, particularly Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus, use this building. The circular form of the Religious Centre symbolizes unity, primarily through its prayer rooms which are different from other places for worship in other universities. It puts all religions worshipping places under one roof, which are close to one another, and the multifaith students use public services together¹⁴. The location of Religious Centre also makes it strategic where all students can easily find it.

Prayer Room for Muslim Students

Based on the observation, Religious Centre provides two rooms for Muslims, one for males and one for females. The male room is named the brother prayer room, while the female one is called the sister prayer room. The two rooms benefit international Muslim students since some other campuses do not provide a particular prayer room for Muslims. Several universities only provide one prayer room for all religions, which is relatively small, so some Muslim students pray in other campus' public spaces.¹⁵ However, praying in public spaces tends to cause discomfort to Muslim students and

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bayan Naif Qutub, "Identities of Arab Muslim Graduate Students: Spaces, Discourses, and Practices at a Canadian University" (2018), accessed July 22, 2022, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0372318>.

others since the tension of Islamophobia remains heavy in Australia.¹⁶

In addition, some international Muslim students often spend their time on campus doing assignments, so the Religious Centre is helpful. As stated by SS, a female informant in this research admitted that she preferred to do her tasks on campus rather than at home since she is more focused on campus. Usually, during working on her tasks, she stayed on campus from the morning until the afternoon. On the other hand, as a Muslim, she must perform Dzuhur and Asr prayers. In this case, the prayer room provided by Religious Centre eased her to perform both prayers as her obligation. Hence, although Muslim male and female students cannot pray in congregations. Moreover, in Religious Centre, every prayer room for Muslims has a facility for *wudu* (ablution), which is rarely found in the prayer places in other universities in Australia. It is important for Muslim students since the Australian toilet system commonly uses toilet paper, which does not meet the requirement of Islamic religious teachings.¹⁷ Muslims need water for *wudu*, so they use the toilet sink. Doing *wudu* in the public toilet in Australia is quite uncomfortable for international Muslim students because they publicly show their religious activities. Moreover, it becomes more challenging for Muslim women who wear the *jilbab* (veil) as covering their hair to hide it from the public is a duty according to their beliefs. Thus, doing *wudu* in public toilet tends to experience a higher level of discomfort for them.¹⁸

On the other hand, SS argued that when doing *wudu* in the toilet sink, she is assumed to be filthy as she splashes the water on the toilet floor. She explained:

“When I went to public places and wanted to perform *wudu*,
I used the sink in the toilet because it was the only water

¹⁶ Roja Gholamhosseini et al., “The Place of Public Space in the Lives of Middle Eastern Women Migrants in Australia,” <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2018.1498293> 24, no. 2 (March 4, 2018): 269–289, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13574809.2018.1498293>.

¹⁷ Zulkeplee Othman and Laurie Buys, “Towards More Culturally Inclusive Domestic Toilet Facilities in Australia,” *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 5, no. 3 (September 1, 2016): 383–391.

¹⁸ Ghani, Hareem, and Ilyas Nagdee, “Islamophobia in UK universities,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Islamophobia*, edited by Irene Zempi and Imran Awan (London: Routledge, 2019), 188–197.

source. It was quite challenging to wash my feet. Other people would be uncomfortable if I put my feet up on the sink. So, I brought a bottle to the toilet and filled it with water. I used the water to wash my feet, but some water splashed on the floor. Then, a woman told me that the toilet floor should be dry. Thus, I wiped the water on the floor using toilet paper since the toilet did not have a mop then.”

This experience shows that some Indonesian Muslim students face difficulty when performing *wudu* in the public toilet in Australia. It becomes more challenging for females since they must take off their veils in public when performing *wudu*. Therefore, providing a prayer room with a particular space for *wudu* is helpful for Muslim students, specifically Indonesian Muslim students.

Another informant, MS, asserted that the prayer room provided by Religious Centre makes her more comfortable praying since it has a *wudu* facility. It includes the seats, facial tissues, mirror, sink, and mop, which are perfect for international universities. Also, in the prayer space, Quran and other Islamic literature are provided. Some Muslim students also provide free drinking water and snacks.

However, another participant, AS, perceives that the prayer room is too small and stuffy, making him uncomfortable praying. It is evident in the Midday prayer when most students have classes. Muslim students must queue to pray since the room cannot handle all students simultaneously. SS mentioned that a Muslim female student asked her to join the action for proposing a larger prayer room for Muslim students due to the increasing number of Muslim students.

Another female participant, MS, asserted that the air circulation in the sister prayer room was inadequate for comfort prayers. She said that as the room had a small capacity that could accommodate only ten students, it was getting more uncomfortable with the stuffy air. Neither window nor ventilation was available in the room. It pushed her to leave the room immediately after performing prayers. She said that was quite different from many prayer rooms in Indonesia. She also participated in filling out the e-form about the improvement of the sister prayer rooms, hoping that the room could be made more convenient.

An Indonesian Muslim male student, AS, also argued that a loudspeaker for *azan* (a call to prayer) is not allowed in the prayer room. Sometimes, he does not pray in the congregation because students come at different times. In Australia, prayer times change

according to the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn, and winter; meanwhile, new Indonesian students commonly will only recognize that prayer time has come with listening to the *azan*. Thus, they sometimes need to recognize that the time for prayer has come through other media. The absence of loudspeakers is due to the tolerance between religions, particularly among the majority. Thus, prayers for Indonesian Muslim students in Religious Centre are relatively comfortable because of the adequate prayer facilities, although it is not as comfortable as in Indonesia.

This finding mirrors the situation of Muslim students in Canada, where there is no call for *azan*. They have to track the prayer times individually.¹⁹ The issue of *azan* has become a complex discussion in several articles. The most exciting finding is that a call to prayer for Muslims in Europe uses light signals called “light-*azan*”. The light signal aims to meet Muslim’s spiritual needs by respecting the local resistance.²⁰ It shows that the effort to accommodate the need to amplify the *azan* in countries where Muslims are the minority exists and grows as technology advances.

Shared Public Services

The Religious Centre in Melbourne provides several public services, such as a pantry and toilets. The pantry provided a refrigerator, microwave, sink, cutlery, and cooking ware for every student, regardless of religion. Those facilities are precisely beside the Religious Centre entrance, a strategic place to ensure students’ convenience. MS said she used this pantry once when heating her food in the microwave. She only found some Muslim students who also used other pantry facilities. SS pointed out that some students use the refrigerator to store food ingredients they bought in the market. They brought them to the campus when they would have a food party. However, only a few students use this pantry, mainly non-Muslim students.

¹⁹ Christopher A Woodrich, “Lived Experiences of Muslim High School Students at J . L . Forster Secondary School , Windsor , Ontario , Canada,” no. September (2017): 1–6.

²⁰ Pooyan Tamimi Arab, “‘A Minaret of Light’: Transducing the Islamic Call to Prayer?,” <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2015.1059126> 11, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 136–163, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17432200.2015.1059126>.

SS explained that she saw only a few Muslim students using the pantry; she admitted that she had never used the pantry. She only entered the room and saw the equipment. She preferred using the microwave in the study rooms because it was easier for her to continue working on her assignments after having lunch. Meanwhile, AS added that students mainly used this pantry when a religious community conducted an event. Most Indonesian Muslim students did not use this pantry for personal use as they only spent about ten to fifteen minutes praying in this building. Moreover, there was another pantry provided in the study spaces.

The toilet is another public facility used by students in Religious Centre. It is near the Muslim prayer rooms. This toilet is Muslim-friendly since it provides containers filled with water so that Muslim students can use water in the toilet. It benefits Muslim students because, according to religious teaching, water is better than toilet paper. It invites students to choose this toilet since other toilets on campus do not provide a water container. To use other toilets, they must bring water in a container (such as a bottle) into the toilet, which makes them uncomfortable. MS explained:

I always use the Religious Centre toilet on campus because it is more comfortable than other toilets. I can use a water container, which is easier for me than bottles. Although I can use toilet paper, I feel that it is still not clean for me.

The statement above confirms why many Muslim students use the toilet within Religious Centre. AS asserted that this toilet was rarely not occupied since Muslim students mostly used it. On the contrary, only a few non-Muslim students used this toilet. AS assumed that this toilet was not provided for non-Muslim students since they do not need water. Thus, they can use other toilets comfortably.

Religious Tolerance

Having prayer rooms close to other religions brings a unique experience for Indonesian Muslim students. In Indonesia, most people are Muslim, so the prayer room for Muslims is provided everywhere without sharing with other religions. In Religious Centre, the chapel is the most significant prayer room, as Christians are the majority in Australia. In 2021, the Australian census revealed that the percentage of Christians was 43,9%, the most significant number. The

second is no religion (38,9%). Muslims had a small rate, only 3,2%.²¹ The prayer room for Christians has a larger space than for Muslims due to the significant difference between their followers.

Based on the observation, Religious Centre has two large and small chapels. The large chapel is in the center of the Religious Centre, surrounded by other religions' prayer rooms, including two prayer rooms for Muslims. This design supports students in building religious tolerance. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religion Affairs (MoRA), religious tolerance is one of four indicators of Religious Moderation, which recently became MoRA's primary campaign to spread peaceful Islam in Indonesian society. According to the Islamic tenet, Allah created human beings of various groups so they could know each other. Many verses in the Quran also teach that Islam upholds tolerance values regarding diversity among human beings.²²

In Australia, religious tolerance is a significant part of religious freedom. In 2017, the Australian Government established an Expert Panel to investigate the adequacy of Australian laws in protecting religious freedom. It proves Australia is highly concerned about religious tolerance as it is multicultural.²³ In 2022, the Australian Government revealed its international religious freedom report. It shows that Victoria, the capital city of Melbourne and one of Australia's two most populous states, increased religious freedom protections and promoted religious tolerance.²⁴ The Religious Discrimination Bill 2022 prevented discrimination regarding individuals' religion, particularly religious activities in public spaces.²⁵

²¹ Australian bureau of statistics, "Religious Affiliation in Australia," accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/religious-affiliation-australia>.

²² Khalid Rahman and Aditia Muhammad Noor. *Moderasi Beragama di Tengah Pergumulan Ideologi Ekstrimisme* (Malang: Universitas Brawijaya Press, 2020), 30.

²³ Australian Government, "Expert Panel Report: Religious Freedom Review | Attorney-General's Department," accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.ag.gov.au/rights-and-protections/publications/expert-panel-report-religious-freedom-review>.

²⁴ "Australia 2021 International Religious Freedom Report Executive Summary" (2021), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/AUSTRALIA-2021-INTERNATIONAL-RELIGIOUS-FREEDOM-REPORT.pdf>.

²⁵ Parliament of Australia, "Religious Discrimination Bill 2022 – Parliament of Australia," accessed July 22, 2022, https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r6821.

This regulation is in line with the religious harmony in Religious Centre.

The legal protection of Australian laws on persons' beliefs is evident in Religious Centre, where students are free to express their religious activities. The close distance between prayer rooms indicates the interreligious relationship between students.²⁶ For some instances, the sister prayer room is next to the large chapel entrance. MS described:

Having a prayer room beside the large chapel is quite interesting because I never go to a chapel in Indonesia. The chapel's entrance is always open so that I can see the Christian religious activities. I could also hear their singing voices while walking towards the sister prayer room in the corridor. It is a new experience that broadens my knowledge about religious diversities.

SS aimed that at Easter, Christian students held an event in Religious Centre. They gave a free snack bucket to everyone there. She was one of the Muslim students who got the gift. Giving a snack bucket to celebrate a Christian religious event without considering the recipients' religions is an example of religious tolerance. Similarly, non-Christian students accepted the gift as their respect for the Christian students. Respect and togetherness reflect the harmonious interreligious relationship, which is a critical aspect of religious tolerance.²⁷

Religious Centre sometimes conducts Interfaith dialogue activities. SS remembered that when she was walking toward the sister prayer room, a Christian student standing in front of the chapel entrance invited her to join the activity. Nevertheless, she politely refused as her class was about to start. She clarified that she would come in if she were free. She believed that entering the chapel was not against her religious teaching as long as she did not pray activities. On the other hand, MS had a different experience. She admitted that when a Christian student offered her to be a volunteer in her religious

²⁶ Hamidah Thifal El Yazenda, "Resolusi dan Negosiasi Konflik Dalam Mewujudkan Keharmonisan: Studi Kasus Gereja Kristen Jawa (GKJ) Joyodiningratan dan Masjid Al-Hikmah," *Harmoni* 17, no. 1 (June 30, 2018): 77–87.

²⁷ Muhammedi Hifdil Islam, "Tolerance in Persepective of Quran and Bibel (Comparative Analysis of Religious Tolerance in Diverses Community)," *Humanistika: Jurnal Keislaman* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 185–197, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://ejournal.inzah.ac.id/index.php/humanistika/article/view/160>.

activity, she politely refused it since she felt uncomfortable due to her belief that involving in Christian worship activities is not in line with the Islamic tenet. Hence, participant responses are different since they are not in the same position.

The principle of tolerance has yet to be enforced relatively in Indonesia. Tolerance values seem to be expressed merely by followers of the majority religion, who must tolerate or respect minority religious groups.²⁸ Thus, such experiences are significant in developing the tolerance of Indonesian Muslim students. They could learn, as the minority, to respect the Christians as the majority.

The Academic Challenges of International Muslim Students

Students' academic challenges are crucial, particularly for scholarship awardees, since they must meet the academic performance requirement. LPDP scholarship sets a minimum grade point average (GPA) standard that awardees must obtain each semester, and those who do not meet the requirement will obtain a warning letter from the scholarship provider. If their GPA in the next semester is still below the standard, LPDP will terminate their scholarship. Therefore, supporting students facing their academic challenges is significant.

The previous research revealed that international students faced challenges in academic achievement for various reasons. The most prominent point is students' second language proficiency²⁹ which sometimes makes students difficult to understand the learning materials and academic writing.³⁰ AS argued:

²⁸ Dudung Abdul Rohman, *Moderasi Beragama Dalam Bingkai Keislaman Di Indonesia* (Bandung: Lekkas, 2021), 79.

²⁹ Ceyhun Yükselir, "International Students' Academic Achievement and Progress in Turkish Higher Education Context: Students' and Academics' Views," *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 6, no. 5 (May 1, 2018): 1015–1021; Michal Wilczewski and Ilan Alon, "Language and Communication in International Students' Adaptation: A Bibliometric and Content Analysis Review," *Higher Education 2022* (July 12, 2022): 1–22, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10734-022-00888-8>.

³⁰ Dania M. Bilal, "International Students' Acquisition of Library Research Skills: Relationship with Their English Language Proficiency," *Integrating Library Use Skills Into the General Education Curriculum* (April 15, 2021): 129–145, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315859835-15/international-students-acquisition-library-research-skills-relationship-english-language-proficiency-dania-bilal>.

As an international student, I have met the English language proficiency requirement since I must get a score of at least 6.5 on the IELTS test to be a student at Monash University. It helps me understand the learning materials and finish my assignments. However, I still experienced some issues with my English since some lecturers spoke quickly with their accents. Also, the materials in the literature used many vocabularies that were new to me. Thus, I have to increase my English skill.

This finding supports the previous study, which revealed that some international students in Australia experienced difficulties in their academics because of several Australian lecturers' accents.³¹ Another challenge is a cultural adjustment, especially in studying. In Australia, students' assignments construct essays emphasizing critical thinking in discovering and developing their ideas. It differs from Indonesian universities' academic culture, where students' critical thinking remains low.³² Thus, Australian universities provide several services to improve students' capability in academic writing. MS explained:

Assignments on Australian campuses are quite different from Indonesia. I used to make academic papers as assignments in Indonesia, but it was not critical thinking. The lecturers provided the problems, and I found the solution based on the literature, which was easier for me. On this campus, I must find my own problem as the idea of my academic essay. This idea should reflect my critical thinking that highlights the significance of my topic. It requires reading a lot of literature, which was challenging for me.

This statement proves that Indonesian Muslim students experienced a different culture in studying. She should change her learning culture to think more critically, which was not easy for her.

³¹ Eunjae Park, "Social and Educational Challenges of International Students Caused by Accented English in the Australian Context: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Linguistic Experience Author School" (n.d.), accessed July 22, 2022, <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/365371>.

³² Syahril Syahril et al., "Towards Improving the Critical Thinking Skills of Pre-Service Teachers in Indonesia," *Journal of Education and Learning (EduLearn)* 13, no. 4 (November 1, 2019): 575–582, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://edulearn.intelektual.org/index.php/EduLearn/article/view/13613>.

Loneliness also negatively influences international students' academic achievement.³³ The lack of English language skills of international students can also make them lonely because they cannot communicate and socialize well.³⁴ Being away from family and friends was the leading cause of the problem.³⁵ It became worse since international students sometimes felt lonely, particularly upon their arrival in Australia, since they were far from family and did not have many friends. SS added:

Sometimes, I feel lonely when I need help from my family or friends when they are not here. I make friends here and know my new friends will help me. However, I feel it is more convenient with my family and friends.

Hence, feeling lonely is not merely about being alone. It includes students' engagement in their academic environment (Gomes, 2020). Although students have many friends on campus, they are generally not open about their academic life, particularly their academic difficulties.

Religiosity and Academic Stress

Challenges in academic achievement, including language barriers, different academic cultures, and loneliness, could lead to "academic stress" among international students. Academic stress is the pressure students feel due to achievement demands that are not proportional to the students' capacities.³⁶ International students are more likely to be stressed due to their academic nuance because they have to adapt to a new learning environment that influences their achievement motivation.³⁷

³³ Delphine N Banjong, "International Students' Enhanced Academic Performance: Effects of Campus Resources," *Journal of International Students*, vol 5, no. 1 (2015): 132–142, accessed July 22, 2022, <http://jistudents.org>.

³⁴ Marie-Claire Patron. "Students' Loneliness During Cross-Cultural Adjustments," in *Addressing Loneliness Coping, Prevention and Clinical Interventions*, edited by Ami Sha'ked and Ami Rokach, (New York: Psychology Press, 2015), 51-66.

³⁵ Nisreen Alshafi and Seong Chul Shin, "Factors Affecting the Academic and Cultural Adjustment of Saudi International Students in Australian Universities," *Journal of International Students* 7, no. 1 (2017): 53–72, accessed July 22, 2022, <http://jistudents.org/>.

³⁶ K. Jayasankara Reddy, Karishma Rajan Menon, and Anjana Thattil, "Academic Stress and Its Sources among University Students," *Biomedical and Pharmacology Journal* 11, no. 1 (2018): 531–537.

³⁷ Mehmet A. Karaman and Joshua C. Watson, "Examining Associations among Achievement Motivation, Locus of Control, Academic Stress, and Life Satisfaction:

Indonesian Muslim students, particularly the scholarship awardees, must control their academic stress to perform well and maintain their achievement due to scholarship demand. A previous study found that religiosity could decrease Indonesian students' academic stress in universities.³⁸ It means that students' religiosity can reduce academic stress of students. Religiosity has been defined variously in the literature. In this context, religiosity is the religious character that leads someone to think, behave, and act regarding his religious teachings. Religious character is one of the 18 values of character building according to the Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education which is the primary concern of education system development in Indonesia.³⁹

Students can manage their academic stress by having five dimensions of religiosity because they believe that their problems, including their academic issues, can be solved with God's help.⁴⁰ Pious Muslim students implement the Islamic teaching that being patient and performing prayers will solve their problems. SS described that when she had difficulty in academics, she always asked for help from Allah SWT, particularly in her prayers. It calmed her to think more clearly and find the solution more quickly. Furthermore, Quran contains several verses that emphasize the help of Allah SWT and the virtue of not giving up in facing problems.⁴¹ Having the knowledge dimension of religiosity means that Muslim students understand such verses, so they will keep trying as a form of obedience to Islamic teachings. As explained by MS:

As a Muslim, I understand that my religion teaches me to have a tough and hardworking personality. So, I always did my best

A Comparison of U.S. and International Undergraduate Students," *Personality and Individual Differences* 111 (June 1, 2017): 106–110.

³⁸ Rofiqoh Laili, "Pengaruh Religiusitas Terhadap Stres Pada Mahasiswa di Universitas Negeri Jakarta" (Jakarta: Universitas Negeri Jakarta, 2018).

³⁹ Muh. Hambali and Eva Yulianti, "Ekstrakurikuler Keagamaan Terhadap Pembentukan Karakter Religius Peserta Didik di Kota Majapahit," *Pedagogik: Jurnal Pendidikan* 5, no. 2 (December 17, 2018): 193–208, accessed July 22, 2022, <https://ejournal.unuja.ac.id/index.php/pedagogik/article/view/380>.

⁴⁰ Rizki Amalia and Fuad Nashori, "Hubungan Antara Religiusitas dan Efikasi Diri Dengan Stres Akademik Mahasiswa Farmasi," *Psychosophia: Journal of Psychology, Religion, and Humanity*, Vol 3, No 1 (2021): 36-55.

⁴¹ Firyal Nadhifah, "Hubungan Religiusitas Dan Resiliensi Akademik Pada Mahasiswa Dalam Perpektif Psikologi Islam," *Al-Qalb: Jurnal Psikologi Islam*, Vol 12, No. 1 (2021): 51–60.

on campus. However, it does not mean I have no academic issues. It has been explained in Quran that every person will face difficulties. Thus, I follow the directions in Quran that I have to be since difficulties will ease after this.

The statement above indicates that Muslim students could religiosity reduces academic stress as they are aware that their academic challenges are part of the life challenges explained in the Quran. Also, they know how to respond to them appropriately through ways defined in the Quran. Thus, religiosity is beneficial for international Indonesian Muslim students to manage their academic stress.

Furthermore, religiosity keeps students motivated to do their best despite their academic challenges. The Quran emphasizes the importance of repeatedly learning.⁴² All informants mentioned that they successfully maintain their scholarships as they could face their academic challenges, control their academic stress, and stay motivated to perform well. SS argued that her religiosity contributed to her academic performance. The availability of Muslim prayer rooms in the Religious Centre supported her spiritual needs, which was essential to her religiosity. She could keep performing prayers on campus as her responsibility as a Muslim because of the availability of the prayer room. Therefore, she believed that she could manage her academic stress by keeping in touch with the God. She felt better after performing prayer, as her mind got relaxed.

Another participant claimed that praying in Religious Centre could recharge her energy in studying. She could not imagine how he should face his academic life's difficulty if there were no prayer rooms on campus. Her academic performances were almost perfect in all courses which took work. She admitted that it was because of the help from the God. She said she preferred to finish the assignments on campus from Monday to Friday as she was more focused than at home. When facing problems, she always asked for help from the God, mainly when performing prayers at Religious Centre.

According to the informants' experiences at the campus related to their religious and academic aspects, it is evident that religiosity helps Indonesian Muslim students as international students at

⁴² Karaman and Watson, "Examining Associations among Achievement Motivation, Locus of Control, Academic Stress, and Life Satisfaction: A Comparison of U.S. and International Undergraduate Students," *Personality and Individual Differences*, 111, 106–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.02.006>.

Monash University manage their academic stress. This finding is in line with the previous research that religiosity plays a central role in helping international students control their academic stress.⁴³ Students felt more comfortable facing their academic issues since they have the dimensions of religiosity: Islamic belief, worship, practice, experience, and knowledge. Such dimensions are supported by the availability of Muslim prayer rooms in the Religious Centre. Students could perform prayers on campus in a particular room, which is only provided at Monash University. Therefore, fulfilling the spiritual needs of international students on campus supports their academic life.

Furthermore, the participants had an excellent academic performance, exceeding the minimum standard set by their scholarship. One participant obtained a near-perfect score, which required hard work, particularly in dealing with various academic challenges. Religiosity, according to them, is seen to help them control their academic stress and support their academic achievement.⁴⁴ Reducing academic stress enhances academic performance by motivating students to study hard yet face several challenges continuously.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Muslim students also assume that their efforts in overcoming academic issues include obedience to Islamic teachings based on the Quranic verses description. Hence, the findings reveal that religiosity contributes positively to Indonesian Muslim academic achievement.

Conclusion

The Indonesian government provides some overseas scholarships for the young generation to broaden their knowledge and skills at the international level. Many students choose Monash University because it performs well in the education sector. As a minority in Australia, Indonesian Muslim students find it pretty

⁴³ Selin Philip et al., "The Impact of Religion/Spirituality on Acculturative Stress among International Students," *Journal of College Counselling*, Vol 22, No. 1 (2019): 27-40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jocc.12112>

⁴⁴ Ilana M. Horwitz, Benjamin W. Domingue, Kathleen Mullan Harris, "Not a family matter: The effects of religiosity on academic outcomes based on evidence from siblings," *Social Science Research*, Volumes 88–89, 2020, 102426, ISSN 0049-089X. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2020.102426>.

⁴⁵ Karaman and Watson, "Examining Associations among Achievement Motivation, Locus of Control, Academic Stress, and Life Satisfaction: A Comparison of U.S. and International Undergraduate Students," *Personality and Individual Differences*, 111, 106–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.02.006>.

challenging to get a prayer room on campus. Monash University is the only campus in Australia that provides a worshiping place for students of all religions to pray at the campus, which is called the Religious Centre. It puts prayer rooms of all religions on the same floor. It also provides sufficient prayer rooms for Muslim students to meet their spiritual needs. It also has public services, including a toilet and pantry. Three Indonesian Muslim students found that public toilets benefitted them since they provided water for cleaning, which is rarely found in other toilets in the university. They believed that having a prayer room close to other religions' prayer rooms developed their religious tolerance, which is crucial in Indonesia as a multireligious country.

As international students, Indonesian Muslims face various academic challenges, such as language barriers, different academic cultures, and loneliness. Such challenges could lead to academic stress. It could be a severe problem for Indonesian Muslim students since most scholarship awardees have to meet the minimum academic performance requirement set by the scholarship provider. Hence, they need support in facing their academic challenges to reduce their academic stress and achieve good academic performance. Religiosity can be the solution since three Indonesian Muslim students felt calmer and more comfortable after prayer, helping them manage their stress, think more clearly, and perform well on campus. Providing Muslim prayer rooms on campus in Religious Centre is helpful for Muslim students' religiosity, which facilitates them to achieve good academic performance.

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