

The Best Innovation of Native-Faith Education Services in Schools: Successful Experiences of Education Services for Minority Groups in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of the Indonesian state, native-faith education services in Indonesia have never been implemented until the issuance of Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture Number 27 Year 2016. This education service marks a new era for minority groups in Indonesia to obtain their rights as citizens. However, the issue of learning facilities, curriculum, teachers, and financial support from the government is very limited. The other issue is the ideological differences among the native-faith adherent organizations, and not all native-faith followers change their religious ID cards (KTP agama) to native-faith ID cards (KTP Kepercayaan). The school environment, where native-faith students' study, also does not universally accept them due to differences in beliefs compared to the six religions officially recognized by the state. The results of the study using qualitative methods and phenomenological approaches stated that in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency, native-faith education services in schools can be carried out since the 2017/2018 year until 2023. There are 4 elements of strengthening native-faith education services in the 2 districts, namely: (a) supporting policies from the local government, (b) solid cooperation between MLKI and elements of institutions under it, (c) education and competency training and also (d) the spirit of service of the native-faith extension workers.

Keywords: Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture Number 27 Year 2016, Innovation, Native-Faith Education Services, Minority Groups, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Children from minority groups are often vulnerable to discriminatory practices in accessing educational services. The Minority Rights Group International (2009) reports that approximately 101 million children are out of school and 776 million adults can neither read nor write, most of whom come from minority groups, whether in terms of ethnicity, religion, or language. Christian Solidarity Worldwide (2009) also reveals that religion or faith is a significant factor behind discrimination against children in education, occurring in almost every country. For example, in Iran, Baha'i children face severe barriers to higher education, while in Mexico, collaboration between school and local officials often prevents children of minority religions from attending school.

Similar dynamics persist in Indonesia, despite its constitutional recognition of diversity under the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). Followers of *native-faith to God the Almighty* (*penghayat*

kepercayaan), communities adhering to ancestral belief systems outside the six state-recognized religions, have long experienced structural discrimination. During the Old and New Order periods, children from these groups were compelled to take religious classes in one of the officially recognized religions, effectively erasing their own faith identities from the national education system (Kuipers & Yulaelawati, 2009; Chen, 2014; Rahmawati. Yeni; Yi-Fong, Pai; Suhadi et al., 2014; Budijanto, 2016).

This discriminatory practice stands in direct contradiction to the principles of universality, integrativeness, and inclusiveness that form the foundation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program (see <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>). The 2030 Agenda of the SDGs aims to ensure that “no one is left behind” in sustainable development. One of its key goals, Goal 4 on quality education, reads: “Ensure inclusive and equitable education and improve opportunities for lifelong learning for all” (Ministry of PPN/BAPPENAS, 2017). This global agenda is in harmony with the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia: Article 28D guarantees that every citizen shall have equal status before the law and the government; Article 28E paragraph (1) guarantees every citizen’s right to follow their religion, worship according to its teachings, and choose their own education. In addition, the National Education System Law (Law No. 20 of 2003), Chapter V Article 12 point 1(a), mandates that every learner “has the right to receive education on religion in accordance with the religion they follow, taught by a teacher of the same religion.”

The Indonesian government began to address the rights of *native-faith* adherents through the Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) No. 27 of 2016 concerning Education Services for Followers of Native-Faith to God the Almighty at Education Units. Later, the Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016 in 2017 provided state recognition of the native-faith adherents’ entity, further strengthening the regulatory foundation for the education of their children. Despite these milestones, implementation remains far from adequate. This situation is ironic, as a high-quality education service for native-faith adherents, comparable to that available for officially recognized religions, is a constitutional and moral necessity.

Several problems continue to arise across regions, each with its own characteristics. Some *native-faith* students are still compelled to choose one of the six recognized religious subjects (Candrasari, 2019; Mawaza & Manese, 2020; Sinabutar et al., 2022; Rosyid, 2023). Access to educational services during this transitional phase remains limited due to; 1) insufficiently qualified teachers, as most native-faith educators are extension workers required only to have completed senior high school (Maulana, 2019; Mahendra & Setyowati, 2023; Perdhana, 2023); 2) extremely low salaries (often below Rp 300,000 per month), with not all extension workers receiving additional school stipends (Noviana, 2023; Perdhana, 2023); 3) the very limited number of extension workers per region (Maulana, 2019; Jouanka et al., 2020; Mawaza & Manese, 2020; Rosyid & Kushidayati, 2020; Siagian, 2022; Noviana, 2023); 4) lack of teaching handbooks for both students and educators (Maulana & Setyowati, 2019; Putri & Pringgowijoyo, 2020); 5) overly generalized curricula that fail to account for the diversity among native-faith organizations (Putri & Pringgowijoyo, 2020; Siagian, 2022; Rosyid, 2023); 6) ongoing discrimination within schools, including acts of exclusion by teachers, peers, or other school members (Rosyid & Kushidayati, 2020; Sholakodin, 2021); and inadequate infrastructure for delivering native-faith education, with some classes held not in schools but in *sanggar* (places of worship) or even in private homes (Maulana & Setyowati, 2019; Noviana, 2023; Perdhana, 2023; Putri & Pringgowijoyo, 2020).

Previous studies on native-faith education at schools, such as those by Maulana & Setyowati (2019) in Surabaya Municipality, Noviana (2023) in Gunungkidul Regency, Perdhana (2023) in Temanggung Regency, and Putri & Pringgowijoyo (2020) in Bantul Regency, consistently show limited school facilitation and low student participation. Most of these studies focus on regions where the number of native-faith adherents is small, thus overlooking how educational services might operate in areas with larger, more organized communities.

In this regard, reports from MLKI in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies indicate that these areas host a relatively high and growing number of native-faith adherent students. Since the 2017 academic year, native-faith education has been continuously implemented in schools within these regions. Their relative success is closely tied to the solidarity and active participation of communities, educators, and local authorities in supporting native-faith education. Understanding these best practices is essential, not only to strengthen native-faith education services at schools but also to provide a model for other regions seeking to advance educational equality for all belief systems. Accordingly, this study addresses three main research questions: 1) How are education services for native-faith adherents being strengthened in schools?; 2) What is the meaning of this strengthening of education services for the students?; and 3) What innovations are emerging from the strengthening of these education services at the school level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right. This principle is affirmed in various international treaties, including the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* at 1948, whose Article 26 states that every person has the right to education, and that education should be free at least at the elementary level. Despite this global consensus, the right to education is still not equally realized for minority and indigenous communities. The *Minority Rights Group International* (2009) found that millions of children from such groups across the world are deprived of quality education or even access to schools. As Curtis notes, education is often the first right denied to minorities, illustrating the structural inequalities that persist within educational systems worldwide (M. Curtis, n.d.).

A key factor contributing to this inequality is the shortage of teachers from minority backgrounds. Lue and McCloud (1998) identified this as one of the most critical issues in the United States, where the student population is increasingly diverse, yet the teaching force remains predominantly white. They warned that by the year 2000, minority students would approach half of the total student population in major cities, while minority teachers remained underrepresented. The imbalance between the cultural background of teachers and students often leads to educational practices that fail to reflect minority perspectives and values.

In response to such disparities, several international policy frameworks have emphasized the protection of educational rights for minority and indigenous peoples. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* explicitly guarantees the right of children belonging to minority or indigenous groups to enjoy their own culture, practice their religion, and use their language (United Nation Human Right, 1989, cited in Sattarzadeh, 2015). Similarly, the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* established a legal foundation for ensuring the educational rights of minorities in Europe, emphasizing both access to schooling and respect for cultural identity (Wilson, 2004). These conventions recognize that access to education is not merely a matter of opportunity but also of cultural preservation and participation.

International organizations such as UNESCO have actively promoted inclusive and equitable educations for minority groups and indigenous community. Sattarzadeh highlights the importance of access to higher education for minority groups and indigenous community; "Underrepresented groups across the globe, including minorities and indigenous peoples, traditionally endure the most unequal, inequitable, low quality educational opportunities."

International organizations have also played an active role in promoting inclusive and equitable education. UNESCO, for example, has consistently highlighted the importance of addressing the educational marginalization of minority and indigenous populations. Sattarzadeh (2015) stresses that underrepresented groups across the globe continue to endure unequal and low-quality educational opportunities, particularly in higher education. Despite decades of advocacy, the persistence of these inequalities suggests that structural reforms remain insufficient to ensure genuine inclusion.

Case studies from different countries further demonstrate the complexity of this issue. In India, Muslim communities and other socio-religious minorities still face significant barriers in accessing quality education. Mohanty (n.d.) analyzed data from the *National Family Health Survey* and found substantial variation in school attendance across socio-religious communities, reflecting the deep intersection between religion, class, and access to education. In the United States, Thomas and Collier (2002) conducted a long-term study of students learning English as a second language, revealing systemic gaps in policy and practice. Their findings indicate that despite progressive policies, educational systems often reproduce linguistic and cultural hierarchies that disadvantage minority learners.

These global experiences highlight a persistent tension between the universal ideals of educational rights and the realities of national policies and social structures. The degree to which minorities can access equitable education often depends on how states define concepts such as religion, ethnicity, and citizenship. In many cases, the recognition of a group's cultural or spiritual identity becomes a prerequisite for realizing its educational rights. This tension is particularly visible in Indonesia, where the definition of religion itself is closely tied to state administration.

Indonesia's context reflects the global challenge of reconciling education, identity, and recognition. The country, known for its rich diversity of ethnicities, languages, and religions, officially recognizes six religions, Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, under the authority of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, followers of *native-faith to God the Almighty* (penghayat kepercayaan), whose belief systems originate from ancestral traditions, have long been excluded from full state recognition. Their ambiguous status has historically limited their civil and educational rights. Only in 2016 did native-faith adherents begin to receive formal civil administration and access to educational services through government regulation.

Despite these advances, scholarly discussions of educational rights for minority and indigenous groups have largely overlooked the lived realities of native-faith adherents in Indonesia. Previous studies have explored international conventions and national policies, but few have examined how these rights are implemented within

the formal school system or how local actors interpret the meaning of educational inclusion. This gap calls for deeper exploration into how native-faith education operates within Indonesia's pluralistic framework, and how it contributes to the broader discourse on inclusive and culturally responsive education.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological method to explore and interpret the lived experiences of native-faith adherents and educational actors in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to understand social realities and cultural meanings from the participants' perspectives. It seeks to reveal how individuals interpret their experiences in relation to their beliefs and educational practices within a specific sociocultural context (Yusuf, 2014). The phenomenological orientation was particularly relevant because the strengthening of native-faith education services is not merely an administrative or policy phenomenon but also an expression of identity, recognition, and cultural resilience in everyday school life.

The fieldwork was conducted over twenty-six days between May and June 2023. Data were collected through four main techniques: document review, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation. Document study was used to examine literature, official policy documents, and previous studies related to the education services of native-faith adherents. In-depth interviews were carried out with key stakeholders, including the chairpersons of the *Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia* (MLKI) of Semarang and Cilacap Regency chapters, native-faith education teachers or extension workers at the elementary, junior high, and senior/vocational high school levels, parents of native-faith adherent students, and officials from the Education and Culture Agencies of both regencies. The FGDs were conducted at the research sites by involving the same informants as well as representatives from *Gema Pakti* (male youth organization), *Puan Hayati* (female youth organization), *Kasepuhan* or traditional figures of native-faith associations, and school representatives responsible for administering native-faith education. Observation was conducted to capture the daily practices, classroom dynamics, and broader school environments where native-faith education takes place. These multiple techniques allowed for triangulation and ensured the richness of data from diverse perspectives.

All interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide, and participants' consent was obtained before recording their narratives. The researcher acted as an active observer during the learning activities of native-faith classes, taking detailed field notes to document both formal and informal interactions. Documents such as teaching plans, school correspondence, and records from the Directorate General of Faith to God the Almighty and Indigenous Community (Dit. KMA) were also reviewed as complementary sources to validate the interview and observational data. The use of multiple data sources strengthened the credibility of the findings by allowing comparisons across different levels of institutional and community engagement.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman's (1994), which consists of three interrelated stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analytical process was iterative and reflexive. Rather than following a linear procedure, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously to identify emerging patterns and themes. Field notes, transcripts, and documents were repeatedly reviewed to interpret meanings related to institutional support, teacher professionalism, community participation, and policy implementation in native-faith education. Through this process, contextual understanding and thematic insights were continuously refined until data saturation was reached.

The phenomenological orientation of this study emphasizes the importance of meaning-making within participants' lived experiences. Hence, interpretation was not limited to categorizing data but extended to uncovering the essence of how native-faith education is understood and practiced as a form of cultural expression. This methodological design made it possible to reveal how institutional structures, local initiatives, and community solidarity interact in sustaining inclusive education for native-faith adherents in Indonesia.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Native-Faith Education Services at Schools in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency

Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency are regencies in Central Java Province with a significant number of native-faith followers, and they have established native-faith education services. In Semarang Regency, there are 12 native-faith adherents organizations, namely *Persatuan Warga Sapta Darma (Persada)*, *Kapribaden*, *Sastra Jendra*, *Pelajar Kaweruh Jiva*, *Wahyu Sejati*, *Prabu Pangudi Rahayuning Budi*, *Ilmu Sejati*, *Paguyuban Kaweruh Kodrating Pangeran*, *Pranajati*, *Ngesti Kasampurnan*, *Sabda Kawedar*, and *Tri Tunggal Bayu*. Out of these 12 native-faith adherents organizations, students seeking native-faith education services come only from two organizations, namely *Persatuan Warga Sapta Darma (Persada)* and *Pranajati*. Similarly, in Cilacap Regency, there are 41 native-faith adherents

organizations, and only students from five native-faith adherents organizations request native-faith education services. The five mentioned native-faith adherents organizations are *Paguyuban Pikir*, *Paguyuban SHK*, *Paguyuban PRKJ*, *Paguyuban PBB*, and *Paguyuban Kawruh Hak 101*.

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For native-faith adherent organizations that do not request native-faith education services, they still choose to have their children participate in religious education services. This situation results in the current number of native-faith students receiving native-faith education services being only a small portion of the overall number of children from native-faith followers. It can also be noted that the native-faith education service program has not received support from all native-faith adherents in Indonesia. *This selective participation highlights the continuing negotiation between state recognition and internal community preferences, reflecting the complex identity politics within Indonesia's plural religious framework.*

Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency are two regencies in Central Java Province with a fairly high number of native-faith adherents and have administered native-faith education services. In Semarang Regency, students requesting the native-faith education services came from two native-faith adherent organizations, namely *Persada* and *Pranajati* associations. In total, there were 12 native-faith adherent associations in Semarang Regency: *Persada*, *Kapribaden*, *Sastra Jendra*, *Pelajar Kawruh Jiwa*, *Wahyu Sejati*, *Prabu Pangudi Rahayuning Budi*, *Ilmu Sejati*, *Paguyuban Kawruh Kodrating Pangeran*, *Pranajati*, *Ngesti Kasampurnan*, *Sabda Kawedar*, and *Tri Tunggal Bayu*. In total, there were 32 native-faith adherent associations in Cilacap Regency, consisting of 20 central associations and the remaining 12 branch associations. In Cilacap Regency, students requesting the native-faith education services came from five native-faith adherent associations, namely *Pikir*, *SHK*, *PRKJ*, *PBB*, and *Kawruh Hak 101* associations. *These regional variations suggest that native-faith education develops differently depending on the density and organizational vitality of local belief communities.*

The native-faith education services in Semarang Regency were administered for the first time in the 2017/2018 academic year. As many as 22 students from *Persada* organization received the native-faith education services during that academic year, and although their number increased over time, all of them were only from *Persada*. It was only in 2022/2023 that, out of 32 students, one student was not from *Persada* but from *Pranajati*. Since then, the students attending native-faith education have come from the two organizations. *This gradual diversification demonstrates how educational inclusion can expand cultural participation, even if it occurs slowly and unevenly across groups.*

This increased number of native-faith adherent students in Semarang Regency had something in common with the phenomenon of native-faith students in Cilacap Regency. Until 2023, in Cilacap Regency, 43 native-faith adherent students had received native-faith education services at schools, ranging from elementary to junior high and senior high schools. The details of these native-faith education participants in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies are shown in Table 1. *Although the numbers remain modest, the pattern indicates growing legitimacy of native-faith education in formal institutions, symbolizing gradual social recognition.*

Table 1. Number of Native-Faith Education Participants in Semarang Regency

Academic Year	Number of Native-Faith Education Students	
	Semarang Regency	Cilacap Regency
2023/2024	33	47
2022/2023	32	50
2021/2022	28	46
2020/2021	23	45
2019/2020	20	40
2018/2019	20	36
2017/2018	22	20

2016/2017	0	2
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Source: Regional Deliberative Council of MLKI in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency, 2023.

These native-faith adherent students in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies learned topics on native-faith education from native-faith extension workers who turned into native-faith education teachers. The decision to transform these extension workers into teachers was made by the Directorate General of Faith to God the Almighty and Indigenous Community (Dit. KMA) after realizing that, until the issuance of the regulation, there were no certified native-faith teachers in Indonesia. The appointment of these extension workers as teachers was therefore a strategic response to ensure immediate implementation. *This institutional adaptation reflects how state mechanisms adjust pragmatically to accommodate minority rights within existing bureaucratic frameworks.*

The placement of native-faith education extension workers in Semarang Regency was first decided in 2017, with two personnel, Mrs. S and Mr. T. At that time, both were studying for their bachelor's degree. One year later, Mrs. S was recruited as a civil servant teacher, and starting from 2018, she was replaced by Mrs. N. In the following year, MLKI and Persada of Semarang Regency appointed an additional worker, Mrs. NH. In the 2022–2023 period, assistant extension workers, Mr. GAP and Mrs. W, were assigned; both were still university students. The detailed competencies of these workers are presented in Table 2. *The dynamic composition of these teachers reflects the emergent professionalization of native-faith educators, driven more by community initiative than institutional supply.*

Table 2. Competences of Native-Faith Extension Workers in Semarang Regency

No	Name of Extension Workers	Education	Competence	
			Skilled Extension Workers	Expert Extension Workers
1	T	Bachelor	✓	✓
2	N	Junior High	✓	-
3	NH	Senior High	✓	✓
4	GAP	Senior High	✓	✓
5	WCP	Univ. Student	-	-

Source: Interview with Native-Faith Extension Workers, 2023

The number of native-faith extension workers in Cilacap Regency was greater than in Semarang Regency; ten in total. Seven of them had earned *Skilled Extension Worker Competence* certificates and the remaining three held *Expert Extension Worker Competence* certificates from the Directorate of KMA. The competence details of each worker are shown in Table 3. *This contrast between regencies illustrates varying levels of institutional maturity, showing how local networks and leadership capacity shape the sustainability of faith-based education.*

Table 3. Competences of Native-Faith Extension Workers in Cilacap Regency

No	Name of Extension Worker	Education	Competence	
			Skilled Extension Workers	Expert Extension Workers
1	M	Senior High	-	
2	KH	Senior High		-
3	SSA	Senior High		-
4	TA	Senior High		-
5	S	Junior High	-	
6	DW	Senior High		-
7	J	Senior High		-
8	SR	Bachelor	-	
9	WPN	Senior High		-
10	Sm	Bachelor		-

Source: MLKI of Cilacap Regency, 2023

These native-faith education teachers in Cilacap Regency performed their duties as teachers in general. They prepared syllabi and lesson plans and planned and evaluated the learning process. For teachers capable of doing so, they developed their own lesson plans; others used plans produced by the MGMP for native-faith education teachers. This also applied to learning evaluations, where some teachers created their own instruments and others used standardized tools from the MGMP. *Such variations in pedagogical practice point to the formative stage of this educational model, balancing between community authenticity and curricular standardization.*

These native-faith teachers received monthly incentives of Rp300,000 (excluding tax). This amount, provided uniformly regardless of workload or distance, was insufficient even for transportation. The low incentive drew attention from the chairperson of *Puan Hayati* Central Java, who raised the issue at the national level, but structural constraints prevented revision due to jurisdictional overlaps between ministries (Interview with DSU; 14 July 2023). *This reveals the tension between symbolic recognition and material neglect, a recurring issue in minority education policies.*

Upon noticing this, the *Pranajati Foundation* and *Persada* of Semarang Regency collaborated with parents to provide additional support for transportation costs. Contributions were distributed evenly among teachers and adjusted according to school assignments (Interview with M, Ungaran; 6 July 2023). *This reflects strong community solidarity and adaptive local agency in sustaining the state's inclusion agenda.* In Cilacap Regency, additional incentives were given only to those teaching at senior high and vocational high schools, if learning took place at schools and attendance records were complete. However, native-faith education teachers at elementary and junior high schools still received no extra support, relying solely on incentives from Dit. KMA (Interview with Mm, 11 July 2023). *This uneven support underscores the persistent gap between formal equality and practical equity, where the burden of sustaining inclusive education often falls on local actors rather than the state.*

MLKI's Role in Realizing Native-Faith Education Services in Indonesia

Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa Indonesia (MLKI), established in 2014 as the national umbrella organization for native-faith adherents, has played a crucial role in realizing and institutionalizing native-faith education services in Indonesia. Since its establishment, MLKI has functioned not only as an administrative representative body but also as a cultural advocate that bridges native-faith communities and state institutions. Its efforts demonstrate how civil society organizations can translate constitutional recognition into practical mechanisms of inclusion within the educational system. The following subsections outline three major forms of MLKI's involvement in this process.

First, Disseminating Native-Faith Education to Schools

Following the issuance of *Ministerial Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 27 of 2016*, native-faith education services required real implementation at the school level to ensure that native-faith students could access religious education in accordance with their beliefs. However, this pioneering effort was far from easy. As most Indonesians were only familiar with state-recognized religious education, native-faith education was largely unknown and often misunderstood (Interview with A, Ungaran; 5 July 2023). This historical absence of native-faith education services created hesitation among native-faith adherents themselves, many of whom lacked confidence and were reluctant to participate.

Recognizing this challenge, MLKI, as the coordinating body of native-faith associations, initiated a systematic effort to disseminate information and establish pilot programs. The steps included: (1) collecting data from families or community members who reported the presence of native-faith students at particular schools; (2) obtaining formal permits from the *Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Agency* of Semarang Regency and from the *Education and Culture Agency* of Central Java Province for senior high schools; (3) coordinating with native-faith extension workers to introduce the program to school principals and teachers; (4) collaborating with MLKI Central Java Province to ensure regional support; and (5) facilitating agreements among MLKI, native-faith teachers, and schools to begin teaching activities.

Through this process, MLKI acted as a mediator of cultural translation, bridging the unfamiliar concept of native-faith education with the bureaucratic structures of the national education system. The dissemination not only introduced the subject formally into schools but also gradually cultivated acceptance among educators and parents. This experience illustrates how institutional innovation in plural societies often depends on intermediary actors capable of linking policy frameworks with the lived realities of local communities.

Second, Coordination for the Preparation of the Native-Faith Education Curriculum

Teaching and learning activities in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies currently adopt *Curriculum 2013* and the *Merdeka Curriculum*, supported by textbooks published by the *Directorate of Native Faith and Indigenous Community (Directorate KMA)*. The preparation of the native-faith education curriculum involved both academic experts appointed by the Directorate and respected native-faith figures, ensuring that pedagogical content remained faithful to the cultural essence of native-faith traditions.

Before this standardized curriculum was available, native-faith education largely relied on teacher initiative. Each instructor, who was also an adherent, used materials from their own organization. For example, teachers affiliated with the *Sapta Darma Association* would teach Sapta Darma doctrines, while those from *Resik Kubur Jero Tengah (PRKJ)* used their own materials. The introduction of the national handbook thus marked a significant

milestone in unifying diverse belief systems under an inclusive educational framework. Nevertheless, enrichment materials specific to each association's teachings were still used to maintain authenticity and contextual relevance.

MLKI's coordination in this process symbolized more than administrative management; it represented an act of epistemic negotiation between indigenous belief systems and the state's standardized pedagogical frameworks. The development of the curriculum demonstrates the effort to balance the universality of education policy with the plurality of Indonesia's spiritual traditions, a central tension in the pursuit of inclusive education.

Third, Mediating Conflicts on Native-Faith Education at Schools

MLKI also played an important role as a mediator in resolving conflicts between native-faith adherents and educational institutions. In Cilacap Regency, for instance, a 2023 case involved a school's refusal to admit a native-faith student. MLKI promptly communicated with the *Education and Culture Agency of Cilacap Regency*, and after a series of dialogues involving the MLKI board, the Head of Culture Department, and the school administration, the issue was resolved amicably, allowing the student to be enrolled.

In other cases, respected elders known as *Kasepuhan*, traditional leaders of native-faith communities, also intervened to mediate between schools and families. One such case occurred at a junior high school in Adipala District, where *Kasepuhan* figures personally visited the school to clarify misunderstandings and negotiate peaceful resolutions. Their involvement reflects the integration of traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms into modern institutional contexts, reinforcing the communal ethos of harmony and dialogue that characterizes native-faith practices.

Similarly, in Semarang Regency, MLKI functioned as an intermediary between schools and native-faith communities, particularly in recruiting qualified extension workers and teachers. Since 2016, MLKI has facilitated communication between schools and native-faith education providers, ensuring that every newly enrolled student with a native-faith background receives appropriate religious education. This sustained coordination highlights MLKI's dual role, as both a cultural representative and an administrative partner, bridging formal state education with local systems of belief.

These examples underline that MLKI's contribution extends beyond policy execution; it embodies the principle of *cultural citizenship*, where marginalized belief communities actively participate in shaping educational governance. Through these mediatory and coordinative roles, MLKI reinforces not only the accessibility of education for native-faith adherents but also the broader recognition of Indonesia's spiritual diversity within its institutional structures.

The Role of Native-Faith Extension Workers in Realizing Native-Faith Education Services

In addition to the contribution of MLKI, the successful implementation of native-faith education services at schools in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies also relied heavily on the commitment and perseverance of native-faith extension workers, who functioned as de facto teachers of native-faith education. Although most of them did not possess formal degrees in religious education, these extension workers had received guidance and training through the *Skilled Extension Workers* and *Expert Extension Workers Education and Training* programs organized by the Directorate of Faith to God the Almighty and Indigenous Community (Directorate KMA). Their motivation and moral commitment became a critical driving force in realizing native-faith education at the school level. *This situation illustrates how local agency often fills the institutional gaps left by policy implementation, transforming limited structural support into a vehicle of social empowerment.*

In Semarang Regency, Mr. A and Mrs. S were assigned by MLKI to disseminate and pilot the native-faith education program in schools. Their initial efforts began at a state elementary school in Bandungan, a highly reputed A-accredited institution. The school administration, having understood the legal foundation of the policy, immediately accepted the proposal and agreed to implement native-faith education. At another state elementary school in Bandungan, Mr. A and Mrs. S discussed the legal framework with teachers and administrators, gradually convincing them of the legitimacy of native-faith education. *Their interactions show how trust-building and legal literacy became vital strategies in negotiating acceptance within formal educational settings.*

A different dynamic occurred at a state elementary school in Candigaron, which had the largest number of native-faith adherent students in Semarang Regency, ranging from first to sixth graders. The process was facilitated by a personal connection between the school principal and the MLKI chairperson, which enabled smooth communication and quick acceptance of the program. *This episode demonstrates the importance of social capital and personal networks in transforming bureaucratic procedures into meaningful collaboration.*

The dissemination process was more challenging at a state junior high school (SMPN) in Sumowono. The extension workers encountered difficulties engaging with the principal, who was a member of a political party in the regional parliament, and with a religion teacher who perceived native-faith education as competition, since native-faith students had previously joined Buddhist education classes. The negotiation took three months and

involved several MLKI administrators before the school finally agreed to implement native-faith education. Conversely, two private schools in Bandungan showed greater openness. Students there preferred private institutions over state schools due to fears of being stigmatized in religion classes. Even though these private schools required participation in standard religious subjects, they allowed native-faith students to practice their beliefs outside the formal curriculum. *These contrasting experiences reveal how school culture, politics, and individual attitudes profoundly shape the practical realization of plural education.*

In another case, dissemination efforts at a state elementary school (SDN) in Derekan were met with initial acceptance but delayed implementation. It took one semester before the school formally started native-faith education classes. Meanwhile, at a distant elementary school in Getasan District, although the school administration welcomed the initiative, parents of native-faith students were not yet ready to let their children attend such classes, resulting in program postponement. *These examples highlight that institutional readiness alone is not enough; parental perceptions and intergenerational attitudes toward belief identity also affect the pace of educational inclusion.*

The experiences of extension workers in Cilacap Regency shared similar features but involved even greater physical challenges. Some had to travel between 30 and 50 kilometers to reach their schools. For example, Mr. Mm, who lived in central Cilacap, traveled over 50 km to teach at a vocational high school (SMK) in Cipari. Mr. S, who lived in Gandrungmangu, commuted 30 km to an elementary school in western Cilacap. Despite receiving only Rp300,000 per month (before tax) from the Directorate KMA, these teachers remained committed. Similarly, Mr. P, who lived in Adipala, taught in a junior high school in Jeruk Legi, 20 km away, while Mrs. SR traveled from Adipala to SDN Karangiri in Maos District (Interviews with extension workers, Cilacap; 11 July, 17 July, and 23 July 2023). *Their endurance underlines the spirit of volunteerism and moral duty that sustains minority education under resource-limited conditions.*

The stories of pioneering, perseverance, and self-sacrifice among these native-faith extension workers illustrate their extraordinary dedication despite minimal financial compensation. Their commitment was strengthened by the continuous support of *Persada* and MLKI Semarang Regency, which provided both moral encouragement and coordination. Together, they shared the determination to ensure that native-faith classes were conducted simultaneously with other religious education sessions, so that native-faith students would not feel different or excluded. *This shared commitment embodies the principle of equality in diversity (Bhinneka Tunggal Ika) and demonstrates how grassroots initiatives can operationalize inclusivity beyond state directives.*

Practices of Native-Faith Education Services in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies

Since its beginning, schools in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency had implemented native-faith education even if they had only 1 native-faith adherent student. The teaching and learning of native-faith education at schools in Semarang Regency were held at school at the same time as the religion education course. The native-faith teachers or extension workers would come to the schools when they had religion course schedule. The rooms used to teach and learn native-faith education were: 1 school had a specifically-designated room for native faiths, 7 schools held it at libraries with no whiteboard, 2 schools held it in libraries with whiteboard, 1 school had it in a classroom, 1 school had it at reception room, and 3 schools held it online/from home. For the textbook, they used the book from the Directorate KMA (KTSP 2018) and 2021 Merdeka Curriculum, and they were developed and supplement according to the students' native-faith associations.

Since their inception, schools in both Semarang and Cilacap Regencies have implemented native-faith education even when there was only one native-faith student enrolled. In Semarang, classes were conducted concurrently with other religious education courses. Native-faith teachers or extension workers attended schools according to the regular schedule of religion lessons. The venues varied, one school had a designated room for native-faith learning, seven used libraries without whiteboards, two used libraries equipped with whiteboards, one used a classroom, one used a reception room, and three conducted online learning from home. The textbooks used were those issued by the Directorate KMA (KTSP 2018 and Merdeka Curriculum 2021), supplemented with materials adapted to each student's native-faith organization. *These varied learning arrangements show both flexibility and resilience, reflecting how inclusivity often begins through pragmatic adaptation rather than full institutional provision.*

In practice, native-faith classes began with greetings and prayers, followed by core activities and a closing. The core included (1) presentation of the topic according to the learning schedule, (2) question-and-answer sessions, and (3) assignments with evaluation. The session closed with expressions of gratitude, motivational messages, information about the next topic, and a concluding prayer. During the core activities, teachers applied different methods and media depending on the topic, such as videos, textbooks, and supplementary teachings from native-faith associations. Some lessons were even held outdoors, especially when related to nature and the universe, reflecting the ecological dimension of native-faith philosophy. *This pedagogical approach reveals an integration of formal learning structure and traditional cosmology, bridging classroom education with cultural spirituality.*

Schools in Semarang responded positively to the presence of native-faith education. There were no reports of discrimination or negative treatment from teachers, administrators, or peers. Students were treated equally, and school committees expressed supportive attitudes (Interviews: Head of Culture Department of Semarang Regency, 3 July 2023; Head of Culture Department of Central Java, 4 July 2023; Presidium of MLKI Semarang Regency, 5 July 2023; Chairperson and Deputy Curriculum of Persada, 6 July 2023; Mrs. NH, 8 July 2023; Mr. T, 9 July 2023; Mrs. N, 10 July 2023; Mr. GA, 11 July 2023; Students D and W, 12 July 2023; Student A, 21 July 2023). *Such acceptance indicates a gradual normalization of religious diversity within the school setting, reinforcing education's potential as a space for interfaith coexistence.*

In Cilacap Regency, native-faith education has been implemented in 24 schools ranging from elementary to senior high levels. During the 2023/2024 academic year, the participating schools included SMPN Jeruklegi 1, SMP Yos Soedarso, SMAN 1 Bantarsari, SMAN 1 Maos, SMKN 1 Kawunganten, SMK Yos Jeruklegi, SMA N 1 Adipala, SMK Tamtama 1 Sidareja, SMK Tamtama 2 Sidareja, SMP N Cipari, SMP N 3 Gandrungmangu, SMK N 1 Cilacap, SDN Purwasari 03, SDN Margasari 01, SDN Gandrungmanis 02, SDN Karanganyar 04, SMPN 1 Gandrungmangu, SMP N 3 Kedungreja, SMPN 1 Adipala, SMPN 2 Adipala, SMA N 1 Binangun, SMA N 1 Adipala, SDN 1 Karangkemiri Maos, and SMA N 1 Maos. *The broad distribution of these schools demonstrates that native-faith education has transcended the pilot stage and is gradually institutionalizing within local education systems.*

Learning spaces in Cilacap varied depending on school capacity: some used first-grade classrooms after 10:00 a.m., others used science laboratories or libraries for junior and senior high levels. In Semarang Regency, 14 schools offered native-faith education at different levels, including SDN Bandungan 01, SDN Derekan, SDN Candigaron 1, SDN Bedono 2, SDN Samban 02, SDN Cando 02, SDN Sudirman Ambarawa, SMPN 1 Ambarawa, SMPN 2 Sumowono, SMAN 2 Ungaran, SMKN 1 Jambu, SMKN 1 Bawen, SMA Bhakti Muda, and SMA Kartika Banyubiru. *This expansion, though modest in numbers, represents a significant symbolic achievement for native-faith adherents, as it legitimizes their presence within the state education system.*

The Factors Strengthening Native-Faith Education Services

The consistent implementation of native-faith education services in Semarang Regency until today has been made possible through the collaboration among various stakeholders, including the MLKI Semarang Regency, the Education, Culture, Youth, and Sports Agency of Semarang Regency, the Education Agency of Central Java Province, the schools themselves, parents or guardians of native-faith adherent students, and several native-faith organizations. A practical example of this collaboration can be seen when a school accepts a native-faith adherent student for the first time, Persada Association immediately assists MLKI Semarang Regency in disseminating information and coordinating the provision of native-faith education at that school.

In addition, *Puan Hayati*, the women's organization within the native-faith community of Central Java, also plays a substantial role in strengthening both formal and non-formal native-faith education. In formal education, *Puan Hayati* focuses on supporting parenting education for women adherents, particularly by developing modules to instill noble values and moral character in their children. Meanwhile, in the non-formal sphere, *Puan Hayati* has organized parenting workshops aimed at enhancing the awareness and capacity of mothers in navigating the rapidly evolving digital environment, especially in addressing challenges brought by social media that may influence family and cultural values among native-faith adherents.

Similarly, in Cilacap Regency, one of the keys supporting factors for native-faith education services has been the initiative of parents and students themselves. Many of them explicitly requested to receive native-faith education rather than attend religion classes. Their refusal to participate in religious instruction stems from a strong commitment to their own ancestral belief system. In response, MLKI played an active mediating role by formally communicating these requests to the schools and local education authorities. As a result of this dialogue, schools and MLKI reached mutual understanding regarding the legitimacy and importance of implementing native-faith education for students adhering to indigenous beliefs.

Understanding the Meaning of Strengthening Native-Faith Education Services in Semarang Regency and Cilacap Regency

The issuance of **Ministerial Regulation (Permendikbud) No. 27 of 2016** was a turning point for the recognition of native-faith education in Indonesia. It was partly prompted by a case involving a native-faith student from a vocational high school (SMK) in Semarang Municipality who, in the 2016/2017 academic year, refused to attend religious education classes. The student's absence from religious lessons resulted in no grade for that subject, which consequently led to his failure to advance to the next grade. This incident became one of the key factors leading to the **Constitutional Court Decision No. 97/PUU-XIV/2016** on Population Administration and the issuance of **Permendikbud No. 27/2016** concerning Native-Faith Education Services in Educational Units.

The enactment of this policy marked a new phase of hope and empowerment for Indonesia's native-faith communities. It signified state recognition and a commitment to eliminating discrimination that had long marginalized these groups. This renewed spirit among native-faith adherents is reflected in the **flow chart of native-faith education services**, which illustrates how, for over six years, schools, MLKI, and the Directorate of Native Faith and Indigenous Community (Dit. KMA) have collaboratively implemented these services.

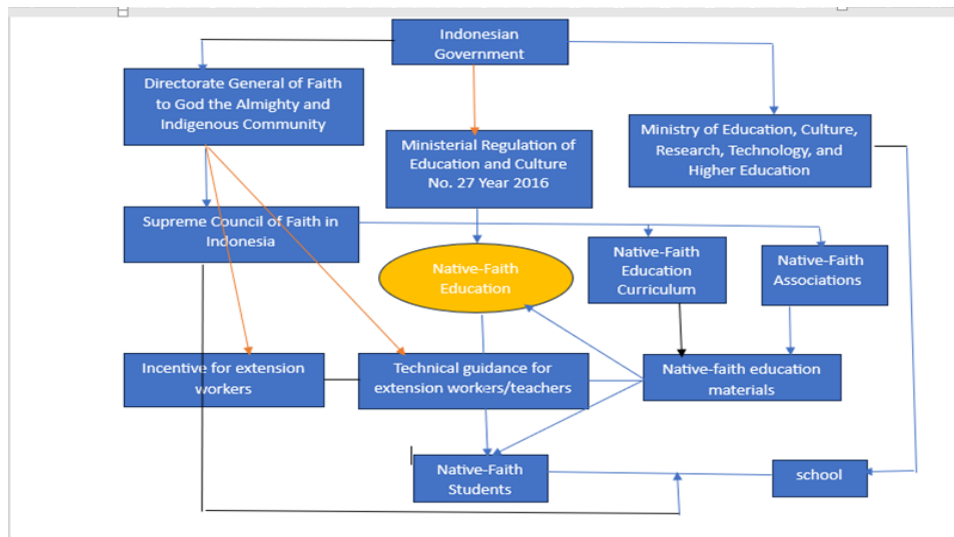


Figure 1. Flow Chart of Native-Faith Education Services in Indonesia

The chart depicts a clear division of responsibilities; the government formulates and enforces policy through the Ministry of Education and Culture, while MLKI facilitates curriculum development, socialization, and coordination with schools. Over the past six years, the collaboration between government institutions, the **Directorate of Native Faith and Indigenous Community (Dit. KMA)**, and the **Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Terhadap Tuhan Yang Maha Esa Indonesia (MLKI)** has created a more structured ecosystem for native-faith education. Dit. KMA has been instrumental in the technical aspects, appointing extension workers as native-faith teachers, providing certification programs, and allocating monthly incentives of Rp300,000. MLKI, meanwhile, has acted as a bridge between the schools, local education agencies, and native-faith organizations, mediating communication, preparing curriculum, and ensuring smooth dissemination of the policy to schools across regions.

Nevertheless, two systemic challenges continue to persist. First, the **status and qualification** of native-faith extension workers remain legally ambiguous. According to **Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers**, educators must hold a bachelor's degree. However, most extension workers have only completed senior or junior high school education and lack formal teacher certification in native-faith education. Second, the **low financial incentive**, a modest Rp300,000 per month, fails to reflect the scope of their duties, the number of schools they cover, or the distance they travel. While the government took a significant step by opening a **Native-Faith Education Study Program** at 17 Agustus 1945 University (UNTAG) Semarang in 2021 (Decree No. 418/E/O/2021), no graduates have yet been produced, leaving the professionalization process incomplete.

In theoretical terms, such structural limitations could be expected to weaken the morale and performance of educators. Yet the empirical evidence from Semarang and Cilacap shows a contrasting reality, **dedication and spiritual commitment compensate for institutional gaps**. Native-faith teachers continue to demonstrate enthusiasm and perseverance despite low pay and long commutes. Their motivation is deeply rooted in cultural pride and the moral obligation to safeguard ancestral values through education. For many, teaching native-faith education is not merely an occupation but an act of service to the community and to the continuity of their belief system. As one participant noted, "One of the motivations that this civitas of native-faith adherents had when attempting to realize the native-faith education services was to preserve the beliefs of their predecessors" (FGD in Cilacap; Mm, 26 July 2023).

In Semarang Regency, several extension workers expressed that their dedication stemmed from a sense of **educational devotion and identity restoration**. They perceived their role as both pedagogical and spiritual, bridging the gap between national education policy and the lived experiences of indigenous communities. Even those who faced logistical constraints, such as long distances and limited resources, maintained a strong sense of duty. "Realizing native-faith education services," one teacher said, "is part of our struggle and service in education. It is not about money but about recognition and dignity" (FGD in Ungaran; N, F, W; 23 July 2023).

Thus, the strengthening of native-faith education services in Semarang and Cilacap embodies a **hybrid model of civic faith education**, where state policy, cultural activism, and community solidarity converge. This dynamic demonstrates that inclusivity in education cannot solely rely on legal frameworks, it also requires **collective moral participation** from communities that are both beneficiaries and co-creators of educational justice.

CONCLUSION

The innovation in native-faith education services in Semarang and Cilacap Regencies demonstrates a practical pathway for advancing inclusive education in Indonesia, despite ongoing challenges such as the limited availability of competent native-faith educators and uneven organizational support. The collaboration among parents, students, native-faith educators, supporting organizations, and the Majelis Kepercayaan Luhur Indonesia (MLKI), alongside the involvement of the Directorate of Native Faith and Indigenous Community (Dit. KMA) and supportive school environments, illustrates how shared commitment and cultural awareness can sustain education services even in contexts of suboptimal institutional support. These experiences reveal that educational inclusion emerges not only through policy recognition but also through persistent community engagement and belief in the value of equitable access to education.

In a broader perspective, the success of native-faith education services underscores the importance of continuous state support for teacher professionalization and social recognition while highlighting the agency of communities in shaping learning content and meaning. By integrating native-faith education into formal schooling, Indonesia moves closer to realizing both cultural justice and the Sustainable Development Goals 2030, ensuring that no child is left behind. This case demonstrates that inclusive education requires both institutional reform and cultural commitment, reaffirming that the recognition of diverse faith expressions is essential for building an equitable and pluralistic society.

Keypoints

- Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture No. 27/2016 provides the legal basis for native-faith education services, ensuring students receive instruction aligned with their beliefs.
- Native-faith education fosters collaboration among schools, families, and faith communities, strengthening understanding and practice of cultural and spiritual values.
- Strengthening these education services supports the development of inclusive, ethical, and tolerant individuals, contributing to social cohesion and sustainable societal progress.

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