

# Religious Orientation and Hope Expressed Among University Students

*Petrayuna Dian Omega and Ngadiman Djaja\**

## Abstract

The education system at the university level in Indonesia teaches religion as a mandatory course for the students, and it can form their religious orientation. Religion orientation and hope have played an important role in the educational field. Both hope and religious orientation play essential roles for university students. The study aimed to examine the relationship between hope and religious orientation among university students. The Adult Hope Scale was used to measure hope, while the Intrinsic/Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scale was used to measure religious orientation. Participants of this research were 439 people, consisting of religion-based university students ( $N= 314$ ) and non-religion based university students ( $N = 125$ ). This study found only internal religious orientation significantly contributed to the level of hope, both in religion-based university and non-religion-based university. The result will be discussed in detail, and further research will be suggested in this paper.

Keywords: hope, religious orientation, university students

## Introduction

All Indonesian citizens must adopt a religion according to Indonesian rules. It is included in the education system, that all students must adopt a religion as their identity. Since religion becomes a vital identity in Indonesia, therefore, asking for and exposing religion as an individual identity is universal. People are familiar with religion as their identity since their childhood.

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\* Author Note: Petrayuna Dian Omega and Ngadiman Djaja Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Petrayuna Dian Omega, Department of Psychology Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana, Jln. Tanjung Duren Raya No.4 Jakarta Barat 11470 Indonesia. Email: [petra.omega@ukrida.ac.id](mailto:petra.omega@ukrida.ac.id).

Religion course is also made mandatory for all students, starting from elementary school to university level in Indonesia. By doing this, the government expects the course can bring awareness to the students about the importance of adopting and practicing a religion. It shapes the habit of the students in learning religion, a habit to raise awareness that religion is essential, but they can be bored, too, as they have to learn religion during their formal education for many years. Students at the elementary level can learn religion in a concrete way as their cognitive development. Meanwhile, students at a higher level, like high school and university level, can abstractly learn religion since adolescents and adults have reached a formal operational stage of cognitive development based on Piaget's theory (Huitt & Hummel, 2003).

A religion-based education institution, Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana, Jakarta, is a Christian-based university. Faith is a dynamic process of individual trust in and loyalty to a center or central values; a central value is something that attracts our devotion and makes us willing to do hard work for it (Fowler, 1991); Fowler, furthermore, stated that religious institutions could have mean values that attract attention and focus from people around it. Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana emphasizes religious values (Christian values) as central values to its daily activities. Christian values derived from the Bible have been applied to campus daily life. The students are expected to understand and internalize those mean values during their study. Hopefully, at the end of their study, the students will bring them to their workplaces as part of the result of their study in a religion-based university.

The religion-based university usually puts religious activities as the primary tool for its central values to build a religious atmosphere around the campus. As a human being, an individual consists of a physical and spiritual dimension. Through his/her faith, s/he believes in God spiritually, and physically s/he will show his/her religious practice as a proof of his/her religious faith. Worships and prayers can be offered in a church, but they can be conducted in other places, such as a campus. One religious activity at a religion-based university is student fellowship. It can be encouraged by the university board, or the students can initiate it. Student fellowship aims to strengthen their faith. The students

invite pastors or religious activists to share the Word of God, which hopefully motivates and anchors their faith in more advanced steps.

The university also provides a counseling center for the students enabling them to talk about their problems to a counselor. The counseling center assists the students individually or in a counseling group, and is Biblically-based or has Christian values. The purpose of the counseling is to remind the students the Christian values taught in the university. The students can join a counseling session based on their initiatives, or as mandated by their lecturer, and/or by the Character Development Unit.

A straightforward way for a religion-based university to build its values is by offering a prayer. Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana does this as well. The university motivates the lecturers (the professors) to start a class with a prayer. By developing this habit, the students are expected to remember God and involve God in their study. However, it also might raise an issue that offering a prayer will only become a habit, not considered as a serious religious activity.

The phenomenon on a Christian campus like Universitas Kristen Krida Wacana, Jakarta emphasizes Christian values as its central values: teaching religion courses, providing character education, conducting Monday and Friday fellowship for the students, providing a Christian counseling center for the students, and encouraging the campus members to start the class with a prayer. The students perform these religious activities related to Christian values during their study. It can lead students to have an internal and external religious orientation. Religious orientation means how a person behaves towards religion, it can be whether a person approaches it or avoids it; and it implies both the religious and non-religious person has a religious orientation (Krauss & Hood, 2013). University boards, in emphasizing the central values as moral behavior such as prayer, fellowship, devotion time, etc. (Welch & Mellberg, 2008) related to religious orientation, in turn, expect the students have not only religious orientation but also influences students' goals in the university. Goals-directed thoughts can be related to the pathways (the ability to find alternative ways) to reach the goals and motivation in using the pathways, which is called the agency, and both components are

called “hope” (Synder & Lopez, 2002). In other words, their religious orientation is expected to influence their hope during their time studying at the university.

## **Religious Orientation and Hope**

Ryan et al. (1993; in Welch & Mellberg, 2008) stated that religious internalization has two dimensions: identification and introjection, which is the basis of religious orientation theory. Ryan et al. stated that identification is an individual choice in accepting the religious belief, while introjection is a condition of accepting a religious belief as mandatory. Religious orientation consists of two parts, internal and external; an individual with external religious orientation is the one who uses his religion as a means for other purposes, while the individual with internal religious orientation is the one who thinks that their primary need is met in the religion itself (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Since the religious and non-religious person has a religious orientation (Krauss & Hood, 2013), it means the religious orientation can exist in religious-based university students, and also exist among the non-religious based university students. We have seen religious university students succeed in their studies and less religious university students failed in their studies, and vice versa. Sometimes it becomes a mystery: What makes them succeed and fail? What is the role of religious orientation among university students? Is there any religious orientation role in university students’ success during their studies?

During their study, undergraduate students need goals, motivation, and steps to reach their bachelor’s degree. In other words, they need hope. Hope theory plays a role in this area. Snyder (1994) stated that hope is a construct in the cognitive which involves expectancy of the individual in reaching goals. Snyder (2000) stated hope has two main components: pathways thought and agency thought. Pathways thought describes that in order to reach specific goals, people need to imagine the routes towards the final destination. Meanwhile, agency thought is a motivational component needed to motivate people along their imagined route towards their goals. The difference in level of hope will determine students’ agency, the motivation, and the pathways: how they make plans to reach their goals. The role of religious orientation in the religion-based university and non-religious-based

university students were explored to find out the impact of their hope, which consists of agency (related to motivation) and pathways (related to the ability to find alternative ways toward the goals), in earning their university degree.

Components of hope, both agency and pathways, can be predicted by religiosity; there is moderate correlation between agency and religiosity, while pathways and religiosity have low correlation (Nell, 2014). Research by Mvududu and LaRocque (2008) found that there was no strong relationship between hope and religious motivation in the Northwest University, which is a religion-based university; but for the Southeast University, which is a secular university, religious motivation and pathways (part of the Hope Scale) has a positive relationship. Researchers attempted to further explore the relationship between religious orientation and hope in details.

## Methodology

### Participants

The data was collected from two different batches. The first batch consisted of undergraduate students from a religion-based (Christian) university in Jakarta, Indonesia. There were 314 participants (113 males, 195 females, and 6 respondents did not reveal their genders). The second batch consisted of undergraduates from various non-religion-based universities located in several provinces in Indonesia. There were 125 participants in this group (30 males and 95 females). We surveyed them to assess internal/external religious orientation and hope. Participants ages ranged from 17 to 29 years old.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics

	Religion-based University	Non University	Religion-based
Gender			
Male	113 (36 %)	30 (24 %)	
Female	195 (62.1%)	95 (76 %)	
Missing	6 (1.9%)		
TOTAL	314	125	
Religion			
Christian	206 (65.6)	24 (19.2 %)	
Catholic	42 (13.4)	10 (8%)	

Buddhist	34 (10.8)	21 (16.8%)
Muslim	18 (5.7)	70 (56 %)
Hindu	2 (0.6)	-
Missing	12 (3.8)	-

### Hope Scale

The Adult Hope Scale by Snyder (1991) was translated into Indonesian and was used to measure hope.

The Religious Orientation Scale by Allport and Ross revised by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) was translated to Indonesian and used to measure religious orientation. A minor adaptation was made toward the hope scale since the subjects were not only Christian but also from several religions. It consisted of 12 items, in which four items were measuring agency, four items were measuring pathways, and the four others were fillers. The items were answered using an 8-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 = definitely false and 8 = definitely true.

### Religious Orientation Scale

The religious orientation scale by Allport and Ross was revised by Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) and translated to Indonesian was used to measure religious orientation. This scale, used a six-point Likert scale where 1 = definitely disagree and 6 = definitely agree. A minor adaptation was made since the subjects were not only Christian but also from several religions.

## Results

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD
Hope – Agency		
Religion based University	5.81	0.96
Non religion based University	5.31	0.93
Hope – Pathways		
Religion based University	6.10	1.07
Non religion based University	5.78	1.07
Total Hope		
Religion based University	5.96	0.91

Non religion based University	5.55	0.91
Internal Religious Orientation		
Religion based University	4.14	0.78
Non religion based University	4.31	0.81
External Religious Orientation		
Religion based University	3.98	0.86
Non religion based University	3.90	0.83

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### Religious Orientation and Hope

There was a significant relationship between religious orientation and hope in the students studying at the religion-based university ( $r = .41$ ;  $p < .05$ ). We found weak correlation between religious orientation and hope for the non-religion-based university ( $r = .35$ ;  $p < .05$ ).

At the religion-based university, agency positively correlated to internal religious orientation ( $r = .32$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and also positively correlated to external religious orientation with lower correlation ( $r = .21$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Pathways positively correlated to internal religious orientation ( $r = .37$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and this score was higher than between agency and internal religious orientation; while pathways positively correlated to external religious orientation ( $r = .21$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Both agency and pathways had the same level of correlation to external religious orientation.

At the non-religion-based universities, agency positively correlated to internal religious orientation ( $r = .26$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and also positively correlated to external religious orientation with lower correlation ( $r = .24$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Pathways positively correlated to internal religious orientation ( $r = .30$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and this score was higher than between agency and internal religious orientation; while pathways positively correlated to external religious orientation ( $r = .29$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Pathways have a higher correlation to external religious orientation than the agency.

Religious orientation accounted for 16.6 % of the variance in the levels of hope reported by the participants from the religion-based university; meanwhile, in the non-religion-based university it was only 12 % of the variance in the levels of hope accounted by their religious orientation.

### *Differences Based on Religious Orientation and Gender*

Participants from the religious-based university showed higher hope ( $M = 5.96, SD = .91, N = 312$ ) compared to the non-religious university ( $M = 5.55, SD = .91, N = 125$ ),  $t(435) = 4.25, p < .001$ , two-tailed). On the contrary, participants from the non-religious university showed higher internal religious orientation ( $M = 4.31, SD = .81, N = 125$ ) compared to the religious based university ( $M = 4.14, SD = .78, N = 311$ ),  $t(434) = -2.07, p < .05$ , two-tailed).

When hope was predicted at the religion-based university, it was found that internal religious orientation (Beta = .354,  $p < .01$ ) and external religious orientation (Beta = .118,  $p < .05$ ) were significant predictors. For the non-religion-based university, it was found that only internal religious orientation (Beta = .217,  $p < .05$ ) was a significant predictor to predict levels of hope, and external religious orientation was not a significant predictor (Beta = .179,  $p > .05$ )

We also examined gender differences in religious orientation and hope. We found that there were significant differences in internal religious orientation between genders. Females had higher internal religious orientation ( $M = 4.30, SD = .79, N = 287$ ) compared to male ( $M = 4.00, SD = .77, N = 143$ ),  $t(428) = -3.49, p < .001$ , two-tailed). Further examination found there was no significant difference in external religious orientation and hope between genders.

## **Discussion**

This research was a preliminary step to provide a theoretical model of how religious orientation impacts hope on higher education students. This research, which shows the relationship between religious orientation and hope especially in the university setting, revealed interesting findings. There was a significant relationship between religious orientation and hope both on the students studying at a religion-based university and a non-religion-based university. No matter the institution, whether religion-based or secular, religious orientation and hope were related, and the higher education institution should notice this fact. It was the opposite compared to previous research by Mvududu and LaRocque (2008) who found that there was no strong relationship between hope and religious motivation in the Northwest University, a religion-based university. We found that only internal religious orientation significantly contributed to the level of hope both in the religion-based university



and non-religion-based university. It means that internal religious orientation was the essential factor that influences the level of hope on university students regardless of their religious affiliation. This finding was crucial, especially towards the university students' success, which was measured by the Hope Scale, then, finally, the development of internal religious orientation was essential.

The surprising result showed that the internal religious orientation on the non-religion-based university students was higher than the religion-based university students. Why did it happen? Our logic would assume that the internal religious orientation on the religion-based university students should be higher because the education system and its academic atmosphere were related to its central religious values. However, it was not guaranteed. The level of internal religious orientation did not seem to depend on the religion-based institution and its moral behavior. Students' internal religious orientation was possibly shaped during their previous studies. It seemed that they already had an internal religious orientation before their study in the university, even though it was a secular university. This possibility was related to the Indonesian education system in which religion as a subject is mandatory in the elementary to university levels. Another possibility was that non-religion-based university students actively participated in the religious activities at their campus, although this possibility needed to be explored further. The students with higher internal religious orientation preferred the quality of the university compared to merely a university with a religion label, and they wanted to explore new experiences in a secular world. Their internal religious orientation could be used as their behavioral control in a secular institution. They could choose and decide the good behavior for themselves.

Since internal religious orientation had a significant contribution to hope, policymakers in the university should emphasize their policies in order to increase students' internal religious orientation, and eventually, this would impact directly the level of hope in the students during their time in the university. Since we know that hope consists of agency and pathways, therefore, by increasing the internal religious orientation, then the university students can have a higher level of agency, the motivation, and also higher level of pathways, the strategy to make plans to reach their goals. It means

that students can maintain their motivation no matter what challenges they experience during their study, and when they experience difficulties, then they can find alternative solutions to their problems.

At the religion-based university, agency positively correlated to internal religious orientation and it supported previous research that found that agency and religiosity have a moderate correlation (Nell, 2014). Besides, pathways positively correlate in a moderate level to internal religious orientation, and it was supported by Mvududu and LaRocque (2008) who found that at the Southeast University, which is a secular university, religious motivation and pathways (part of the Hope Scale) had a positive relationship, although the correlation according to other previous research was low (Nell, 2014).

At the non-religion-based universities, agency positively correlated to internal religious orientation, and it supported previous research findings that agency and religiosity have moderate correlation (Nell, 2014). Pathways positively correlated to internal religious orientation at the moderate level, but the correlation of previous research was low (Nell, 2014).

Religion-based university students had higher agency and pathways, and also higher in total hope compared to non-religion-based university students, which means they had higher motivation and had various ways to pursue their studies. For the religion-based university students, they seemed focused on the pathways, the alternative ways in learning strategy and how to keep their agency (their spirit or motivation) in good condition during their study. On the other hand, they seemed not to pay much attention to ethical behaviors, and in turn, towards religious orientation. For the non-religion-based university students, religious behaviors seemed essential in the secular world and they put it as a priority in daily activities, meanwhile their agency, their motivation, and their pathways, their alternative ways in their study, seemed easy to maintain without much effort, and that was the reason it seemed to be less prioritized.

Furthermore, we also found that religion-based university students had slightly higher external religious orientation compared to non-religion-based university. It seemed that students who come to a religion-based university expected that they could get more “religious value” and become a better person (as expected by many parents) when they enrolled to study in this type of institution. If a

religion-based university wanted to increase the student's internal religious orientation, then they could do religious service as mandatory for the students; although the effectiveness of this policy needs to be assessed further.

Since religious orientation accounted for 16.6% of the variance in the levels of hope reported by the participants from the religion-based university, the university should pay attention to the role of religious orientation. It determined the students' agency (will power or motivation) and pathways (the alternate ways towards goals); meanwhile, only 12% of the variance in the levels of hope was accounted by their religious orientation at the non-religion-based university.

We found that females had higher internal religious orientation compared to males and it was similar to previous research which found that females have higher religious internalization than males (Welch & Mellberg, 2008). Ryan, Rigby, and King (1993) stated that identification and introjection as components of religious internalization, both are internalization forms, are suitable measures of the internalization process for maturation in spirituality. Females are found more intensively and frequently religious than males (Francis, 1997). The university students in this research mostly were adolescents, and adolescence ends around 18 to 22 years old (Santrock, 2008). This age is the time when a student does his/her university study. The university students have abstract thinking because they have already reached their late adolescence and ready to start their adulthood period. As an adolescent, their interest in thinking about religion and morality involving abstract thinking is increased (Steinberg, 2014). Religious orientation is somehow related to abstract concepts. The way people think about their religiosity determines their real religious activities, and it leads to their religious orientation.

Religion comes from a fundamental internal belief. The internal belief drives people to do their religious activities for building their relationship with their God. It forms an internal religious orientation. However, when the religious activities are done as a means to get some advantages, then it forms the external religious orientation. The externally religious oriented people will develop their goals in the future because they can get something positive from their religious activities, and the

internally religious oriented people develop their goals because of their faith to their God (Allport & Ross, 1967).

The religious activities like worship and prayers develop the relationship between individual and God. The relationship can be closer and stronger. It happens when an individual emphasizes the internal religious orientation, but vice versa, the relationship to God, was so superficial when an individual focused on the external religious orientation. The purpose of developing a relationship with God faces barriers when an individual misunderstands the meaning and the purpose of religious activities. It can lead people to have an external religious orientation. The individual can be trapped into several incorrect religion practices like ritualism, aestheticism, and formalism (Hardjana, 1993).

Religious activities are the means to worship God, but when people think that there should be a fixed pattern in worship, then it becomes ritualism. University students can do rituals at a campus if the system pushes them to do prayers and join worships. In that case, religious activities are no longer a means to worship God, but merely an obligation for the students. Ritualism will mislead the students in their spiritual journey. They cannot strengthen their faith since the purpose of religious activities is forgotten. The purpose of religious activities is to strengthen the relationship between human being and God. The university system should pay attention to this purpose; otherwise, the religious activities will bring the students into ritualism that would be useless.

When a university or the student emphasizes the beauty of the religious activity practices: its building, worship room, music instruments, stage, decoration, and souvenirs, then, it leads to aestheticism. The center of the worship is no longer God, but merely its beauty. The primary purpose of the worship and prayers focuses on the superficial thing, its beauty, not the faith of the congregation. It will bring failure to faith growth.

Formalism is another challenge of these religious activities. When worships and prayers have been practiced for years, there is a possibility they will turn into a habit, but with less spirit. If there is no change to refresh the worship and prayer, then formalism cannot be avoided. Students will do the

same thing for religious activities like worship and prayers every week without getting enjoyment. It is almost the same as not doing religious activities as there is no difference.

The adolescents' beliefs focus on ideological and spiritual things but have less focus on practices, religious customs, and rituals (Steinberg, 2014). The religious activities that emphasize ritualism, aestheticism, and formalism in the campus seems not suitable for the university students. Therefore, the university should make a better design for the religious activities where spiritual things become the focus, although it needs to be explored further.

Religious orientation makes people think about their future lives. It is related with hope theory, which consists of agency and pathways, whereas agency (the willpower) motivates people and pathways (the way power) drives people to find ways to reach their goals (Snyder, 1994). Snyder (1994) stated the willpower helps us make commitment towards our goals, clear thought to reach our goals, and also initiate and maintain actions toward our goals; while the way power is our capacity to make ways as many as possible to get to our goals, when our goals are defined well, then we can manage our planning easier.

### **Further studies**

Several recommendations for future research are suggested in this study. First, it will be interesting to see the relationship between gender and religious orientation in a longitudinal study, for example, whether students in the religious-based university will change their religious orientation from external to internal. We also recommend exploring other factors that may be contributing to hope in university students, such as personality factors and family factors.

Second, this study involved only one religion-based institution. It will be interesting to see whether a similar result will appear in other religion-based institutions. Third, it was only internal religious orientation that contributed to hope on the religion and non-religion-based university students. Therefore, it is suggested that the institutions make a policy to increase their internal religious orientation. Finally, this study will be interesting if it is replicated in other countries that do not make religion mandatory for their citizens.

## Conclusion

Internal religious orientation exists both in religious-based university and non-religious-based universities. It means that Indonesian university students have religious value; we assume this happened because an Indonesian citizen is mandated to adopt one religion in their life. This fact is reflected in our national ID that shows our religion. Meanwhile, external religious orientation only exists as a predictor of hope in a religion-based university.

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