

Understanding Religious Tolerance Through the Human Rights Lens: The Implication for Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The study was conducted to comprehend the way Graduate School students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia, define tolerance, and view its significance and evidence-based practices that benefit the community and society. The comprehension could be used to mitigate conflicts and tensions which in turn positively affect societal living conditions. All of these aim to eradicate intolerance toward minority groups and ultimately strengthen the national harmony.

Methods – The qualitative study was run through interview with the students. Additionally, a literature review was also implemented to enrich primary data. Twelve students of School of Graduate Studies of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta were solicited through a convenience sampling, in which invitation letters were sent to them together with the informed consent. Those who responded to the letters were recruited to be participants. Data was gathered through individual interviews, and a focus group discussion was conducted at the end to consolidate overall data. We analyzed the data through intensive reading of verbatim transcripts prior to categorization establishment. Then, clusters were created for establishing themes.

Findings – Understandings of religious tolerance can be explored in some critical issues such as freedom to religion in light of human rights and limitation, concepts of tolerance, significance of religious tolerance, evidence-based practice of such tolerance, and understanding benefits for societal harmony.

Research implications/limitations – The twelve participants involving in the study imply significant impacts to Indonesian society as the Indonesian government is intensively maintaining tolerance and harmony for the nation unity despite the different background society's existence. The small number of the participants cannot lessen the research validity because the study does not seek generalizability but understands the knowledge and experience of the participants.

Originality/value – The research contributes to boost both individual and society for promoting religious tolerance values.

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Introduction

Many existing studies emphasize the importance of mutual respect among religious groups in Indonesia. Indeed, some studies advise religious adherents not to demean persons of different religion, and emphasize the need for harmonious relationships maintenance (Handayani & Suaidi, 2020; Hermawati et al., 2016; Herman & Rijal, 2018). A notable Indonesian study in Palangkaraya of Central Kalimantan investigated the Ngaju tribe, which has both Muslim and Protestant members. The tribal members do find commonalities and give mutual help (Normuslim, 2018). Research also reveals the overall significance of religious tolerance, and some of the studies were conducted due to concerns regarding a radicalism that threatened the followers of Ahmadiyya and Shi'a (Azca et al., 2019; Budiman, 2020; Burhani, 2014b; Mundzir, 2012; Rozak, 2019; Rufaedah, 2016; Wahid et al., 2020). A participant in the focus group discussion expressed that it was unwise to justify one's faith the rightest one because ideology is somehow socially constructed. Other studies simply arose from an interest to observe exemplary day-to-day current religious tolerance. There is interest in opinions of Muslims living side-by-side with Christians (Lukito, 2016), for example. With regard to tolerance of versions of a shared religion, there are also studies on perceptions of unfair treatment of minority Muslim groups, such as the Ahmadiyya and the Shi'a (Burhani, 2014c; Formichi, 2014; Hamdi, 2012). Such research has observed violence against the human rights of varied religious adherents in Indonesia, even though Article 29 of Indonesia's Constitution 1945 guarantees everyone's right to believe and to worship in the religion of their own choosing.

In Indonesia's current 268,000,000 population, there are Muslims (87,2%), Christians (10%), and varied followers of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Kong Hu-cu (Hefner, 2020; Hutabarat, 2023; Nugraheny, 2020). Indonesia is a pluralistic society with many religions, ethnicities, and socio-cultural groups, and these varied characteristics had already established their legacies before the Arab and European colonies' presence during the 12th to 19th centuries (Hutabarat, 2023; Lapidus, 2006). Therefore, the aims of the research are (1) to explore the methods of religious tolerance maintenance – an important citizen cohesiveness to be established – in a pluralist society, and (2) to investigate how Indonesia's pluralist communities have been avoiding community clashes.

A casual observer in Indonesia, nonetheless, may not initially realize that 23% of its citizens are non-Muslims, and thus religious tolerance is a necessity in the country. Indonesia has indeed worked to ensure that every citizen has the same rights under the law (Bourchier, 2019; Sulastri, 2018). Indonesians nonetheless do tend to view their country as predominantly Muslim; and some of those in this majority demographic may cautiously keep their opinions silent when minorities experience intolerance (Colbran, 2010; Nurrohman, 2014). Also, Suradi et al., (2020), explicated that some intolerance stems from differential understandings among religious adherents, as regards the Holy Scriptures. Some interpretations may not comport with the government's campaign for religious moderation (Saifuddin, 2022), and may not keep the moderate attitude that religion should stem from, and best be upheld within, each family (Widana & Wirata, 2023).

To succeed in having all religious groups living peacefully together, any nation needs tolerance. Theoretically, tolerance has been defined as the willingness to accept behavior and beliefs that are different from someone's own, even if he or she disagrees with or disapproves of them (Landau, 2000). For many, the word tolerance is also a political term for the goal of harmony. Technically, the practice of tolerance allows a pluralistic state to recognize human equality among all its people, as Cross (1985) asserted:

A pluralist state accepts a variety of ideological and normative orientations and activities. Such a state does not only tolerate the differences, but also recognizes equal rights for all differing groups (religious, ideological, ethnic, racial). Such a state calls, however, for a substantial area of consensus. Pluralism presupposes acceptance of both, of a universalistic and a relativistic approach to norms, and some absolutes.

To measure national tolerance, indicators have been used for assessing the extent of neutrality toward varied practices of religion, and/or the presence of legal facilitators and guidance regarding the practice of religions. Many consider Indonesia to be tolerant because it has successfully accommodated many ethnicities, while also protecting rights for belief and worship in varied religions. Even so, Nurrohman (2014) observed some apparent ignorance by a majority believing that behaving intolerantly to minorities can be claimed as justifiable. This was seen in the torture of Shi'a followers in Yogyakarta (Makin, 2017), in Madura (Formichi, 2014; Hamdi, 2012; Rozak, 2019; Rufaedah, 2016), and in Makassar (Wahid et al., 2020), as well as in the aggression of anti-Ahmadiyya in Java and Lombok, and anti-Christian actions toward missionaries in Java (Budiman, 2020; Burhani, 2014a, 2016; Lukito, 2016). Furthermore, while state actors might not have conducted explicit acts of intolerance, some radical Sunni groups, claiming to be the foremost defenders of Islam, have nonetheless promoted intolerant attitudes by using semi-governmental bodies, such as the Council of Indonesian Ulama, to justify radical actions (Achmad, 2019).

Nurturing religious tolerance is critically important for national sustainability and development, in order to maintain domestic cohesion and defensive strength. Religion becomes an attitudinal guideline for its adherents to determine life objectives, personal identity, denominational identity, social identity, and thus even a nation's identity (Colbran, 2010). Therefore, carelessness toward such internal societal capital can create a potential for conflict (Nazmudin, 2017). Indonesia is a notable example of a pluralist nation (Cross, 1985), due to its multiplicity of ethnicities, cultures, languages, and races, plus its inclusion of six religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Kong Hu-chu). The pluralist view was recognized in the Constitution of 1945 (Hutabarat, 2023; Rifa'i, 2019; Suradi et al., 2020; Ulfaturrohmatuuririn et al., 2021). The six religions are each resourceful and worthy, yet if not conducted in positive ways, the situation could become problematic for Indonesia's political commitment to one of the five principles of *Pancasila*, namely national unity.

Such religious tolerance is an instrument for establishing harmony (Hasan, 2018); and harmony, as a balanced simultaneous accommodation of many views, is considered a primary goal for social cohesion. In this context, appropriate understanding by all

adherents greatly influences the manifestation of tolerance among varied religious communities. It is argued that religion can encourage the creation of a peaceful society, even when at once it has two opposing sides. So on the one hand, religion is path for bringing together people of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds, yet on the other hand, religion might take some paths which lead to disharmony or conflict (Baidhaw, 2006; Nazmudin, 2017). Misunderstandings about religions can result in a misery that disrupts social harmony (Arif & Lessy, 2019).

Methods

Participants and Sampling

Convenience sampling for participant selection was used to recruit six male and six female Muslim students, from easily accessible location, from the School of Graduate Studies UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Interviews were carried out, and the participants' personal viewpoints and their contribution, as the majority envision, to tolerance improvements were sought as they responded to research questions. The twelve students were solicited from the enrolment in courses related to Islamic studies and religious tolerance. Participants were contacted by emailed letters of invitation, which informed them about the research topic and ethical conduct standards (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020; Polit et al., 2001). The invitation emailed letters were sent to them early before the study started. Of twenty students contacted, twelve responded. The participants understood the objectives of the study, and they realized that being involved in the study was voluntary.

Data Collection

Interview is the main source of data collection. We collected data from individual interviews and from focus group discussion. We gathered data from each individual participant who had at least two interview sessions in which we asked their opinion, feeling, knowledge, and perspectives about the topic. Data were digitally recorded during the sessions, and then we transcribed them into verbatim to facilitate data analysis and conclusion drawing.

Additionally, we also read and summarized credible religious-tolerance-related online sources such as journal articles and website documents. We considered these sources due to their selective focus on disciplinary research, with the published reports being based on a peer-review process for evaluating quality and significance (Nagmode, 2019). We sought to read discourses related to religious tolerance's effects toward establishing and maintaining social cohesion, by avoiding ideological clashes and by ending illegal actions against any individual's right to hold beliefs different from the societal mainstream. We took note of, and highlighted, the parts of these sources that were pertinent to our research questions (Kumar, 2005).

Data Analysis

The qualitative literature review and an in-depth interview method were thereby the basis for our interview structure and of subsequent analysis of results as we examined

patterns within respondents' answers (Neuman & Kreuger, 2003). As when we did data analysis, we created categorizations in the forms of theme after coding was done. We did data coding manually by identifying similarity of words, phrases, and meanings in the transcribed texts (Engel & Schutt, 2005). We then tried to find similarities and differences in the texts. Based on repeated and thorough readings of the journal articles and of our verbatim transcripts, we derived six themes, namely: (1) regarding freedom to religion as a human right; (2) defining tolerance; (3) considering the significance of religious tolerance; (4) finding the benefits of inter-religious tolerance; (5) recognizing the relationship between tolerance and harmony; and (6) documenting evidence-based practices of religious tolerance.

Result and Discussion

1. Freedom to Religion and Human Right

For protecting minorities, Article 29 (in points 1 & 2) of the Indonesian Constitution of 1945 stipulates that the state shall facilitate each citizen's freedom to choose a religion and to practice it peacefully. Also relevant is Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1976) similarly states that no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice. The ICCPR on Discrimination, about the basis of religion or belief, interreligious discrimination or tolerance, acknowledges in Article 1(2) that "each State Party to the present Covenant undertakes to respect and to ensure, to all people within the territory and subject to its jurisdiction, the rights recognized in this present Covenant, without distinction of any kind, such as [...] religion [...]." And Article 26 states, "All persons are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection of the law. In this context, the law shall forbid any discrimination and guarantee to all people equal and effective protection against discrimination in any place and condition, such as [...] religion [...]." Article 27 then maintains, "In those States in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities live, people belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to appreciate their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, and to speak with their own language" (Hathaway, 2007).

Due to varied practices for following the terms of these Articles, each community may promulgate responses related to the Articles, which nonetheless vary, due to differing interpretations. Each Indonesian Province engages in specifying policies, seeking sustainability, and dealing with differences of historical experience, including its population's growth and diverse composition. Indonesia geographically is a widely spread-out nation of islands, thus there can especially be varied viewpoints and understandings

about the freedom of religion. And at times, due perhaps to ambiguity in policies, the people in power may take advantage of gray areas in the laws (Arifin et al., 2019; Burhani, 2014b; Utoyo, 2017).

In the same vein, being religious is determined by the Indonesian Constitution but the citizens are given a freedom of choice in adhering a faith or a religion. Toward this, P4 stated:

Freedom occurs when a person is able to worship, he or she is able to practice their religious teachings without disruption.

The overall conclusion from the focus group discussion is that freedom of choice for a faith is everyone's right. Each person has the right to practice their religious teachings with no fear of state or other entity's intervention. Also, this includes the freedom to express an opinion. In order to people's rights and to nurture the right of freedom religious adherence and freedom of speech, the presence of the supremacy of law is essential. However, many misinterpret the meaning of freedom as they suggest that it allows someone to do whatever they intend to. In contrast, freedom is given to a person together with the consequences of their actions.

Each person has freedom and the right to do things. The person has his or her own perception in articulating freedom. So, it is wise that they must have the freedom and rights, but what they do must be within law and norms. In other words, the freedom and the rights must not violate nor bring negative effect to others. Toward this, P5 added:

In a democratic society, a person cannot take someone else's freedom away. One cannot bring negativity to others. Freedom does not mean free with no limit. There must be boundaries – the freedom owned by others.

Defining Tolerance

The word “tolerance” can be defined as “a fair and permissive attitude toward those whose race, religion, nationality, or skin color differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry, or a fair and permissive attitude toward opinions and practices that differ from one's own” (Webster's American Dictionary, 2000, p. 826).

Tolerance and harmony are interrelated. A harmonious society can be seen through its members' mutual respect shown to each other. This means that citizens recognize differences in societal beliefs, customs, and cultures, and yet each person accepts a responsibility to not disrupt society by imposing his or her belief on others (Verkuyten & Kollar, 2021). This recognition can strengthen society overall, as reciprocal help and understanding become core values for keeping their peace (Allen et al., 2021). This forges relationships among different people, rather than exacerbating tensions. Maintaining tolerance and thus harmony, among members of differing faith communities, should begin in the family, and then spread to the larger effect (Hutabarat, 2023). Thereby harmony is manifested as peace, toward long-term objectives. Since religion, regardless of its particular formal expression, is inseparable from people's culture (Abdulla, 2018), the freedom to live in a faith peaceably must be protected; and even converting to another faith should also be protected (Oyetoro & Talabi, 2023).

Respect is the key attitude to be performed by a tolerant community. This attitude builds commonality of people with different ethnicities and religious affiliations, so that they can live peaceably side-by-side. This attitude is an important basis for building a cohesive community. Tolerance, as described in the Qur'an, involves recognizing differences, and two interpretations of this word exist. One interpretation states that tolerance allows the existence of differing communities (Abdillah, 2001). The other interpretation acknowledges tolerance as an attitude of recognizing others as being either within or outside the community. Relative to pluralistic society, the Qur'an calls for the faithful to be *ummatan wasathan* (a moderate community) which can serve as a role model for humanity, thereby motivating people to do good things. The word *wasathan* denotes a positive "middle" status that exists between two extremes (Ali, 2000; Arifin, 2016).

Tolerance among the faithful can also mean that each religious community maintains inclusivity, especially for members of other religions to conduct their own worship patterns and to follow their own religious teachings without being hindered (Burch-Brown & Baker, 2016). Some theological grounds embody messages of tolerance in Muslim society, and Islamic theology supports the ideas of religious pluralism, due to the rise of Islam in the 7th century, as was not inseparable from the civilizations of other believers, such as Zoroasters, Christians, or Jews (Alkhateeb, 2017; Muqowim & Lessy, 2019). This view acknowledges that, over time, these civilizations had contributed to the development of Islam, as Hourani (1991, p. 5) has described:

... a religious movement appeared on the margins of the great empires, those of Byzantines and Sasanians, which dominated the western half of the world. In Mecca, Muhammad began to call men and women to moral reform and submission to the will of God as expressed in what he and his adherents accepted as divine messages revealed to him and later embodied in a book, the Qur'an.

Muslims historically have lived side-by-side with adherents of other religions, including people of different ethnicities, languages, faiths, or cultures. The modern world can perhaps be seen as more sophisticated, since citizens in most nations encounter a variety of outlooks, influences, and political objectives on a daily basis. Such situations lead Muslims to a wise perspective about responding to modernity so that they can contribute to the world's multicultural societies (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994). The outlook is that God has created various characteristics for human beings, amid which is the commonly shared tendency for them to adopt a religion; yet He gives them freedom of choice (Qur'an [11]: 118):

And if your Lord had willed, surely all those who are in the earth would have believed altogether. Will you then force men till they become believers? (Qur'an [10]: 99).

There is no compulsion in religion. The difference between guidance and error has been made clear. Whoever rejects evils and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah hears all and knows all. (Qur'an [2]: 256)

Freedom without coercion has to do with the freedom of choosing a religion, but then one must strive to live by all of its beliefs. By choosing to embrace Islam, a person commits to being obedient to the Islamic teachings. It is not correct for a Muslim to think

that since there was no initial compulsion to choose Islam, then he or she may choose which teachings to obey (Shihab, 1992). The Qur'an [2]: 256 says that a person has self-determination for choosing a religion, but thereby he or she has become answerable to all of its teachings and is not free to choose which to implement or not. Obedience for a Muslim is appreciated, and there is freedom to choose when he or she is interested in embracing Syi'a atau Ahmadiyya. This is asserted by P1:

They have the right to determine the choice, which everyone should respect. Then there should not be personal interests to interfere with the affairs of God, because God knows everything, and judgment is His prerogative.

Anonymous participants realized that when they happened to experience an intolerance such as stereotyping, discrimination, or stigmatization, they tended to take the misery situation for granted (for example, in politics, being minority due to minor votes). And especially during the political campaign in Indonesia, members of few-in-number-of-follower parties do not want to take risks against that of much larger parties. P1 asserted that in 2017 when the governor of Jakarta was overthrown from his governance, she had to accommodate the majority voice to avoid isolation from the mainstream. In terms of freedom to choose a religion, the government or the third party cannot prohibit someone to engage in religious practices. Law should not violate one's freedom of practicing their religion.

Tolerance theoretically is a recognition toward differences of the other, or individuals, or groups of people, whether they believe in certain religion, faith, culture, or adore one political party. In Webster's American Dictionary (2000), tolerance is defined as permissive of someone toward the other. About religious practice, participant students did not deny differences, and made any necessary adjustment to live in harmony with their surroundings. The participant admitted that there are differences and this is a confession of self-defeat although it is difficult.

2. Seeing the Significance of Religious Tolerance

An individual has the right of submission to a religion without coercion or force by other people, nor by religious orthodoxies, nor by government, because the right is granted by God. This right has earthly guarantees by international law (ONHCR, 2020). Due to each individual having self-determination, all people need to understand this right to religion, and therefore, religious tolerance should be a priority. This means differences of beliefs must not impinge on the rights of each faith community to be free in their association, assembly, attitudes, and non-aggressive behavior (Iqbal, 1983; Wahid et al., 2018). Adding to this, P2 mentioned:

Because of differences, everyone should have freedom to believe in and embrace a religion, and should pay respect to any differences in other religious teachings. The importance of religious tolerance is for there to be respect in the overall interactions.

Accordingly, the faithful may interact peacefully not only within their own group, but also with adherents of other religions. To be socially meaningful, the faithful should be able to embrace tolerance in society to maintain their own faith identity yet while also

avoiding any ideological tensions or overt physical clashes (Verkuyten, 2022). Indonesian society generally respects the existing official religions because those religions were part of the establishing of Indonesia. However, divisions and conflicts due to religious sentiments do sometimes occur.

P4 stated that the course of religious tolerance is a sensitive topic to discuss in public. The topic is sometimes debatable among the Islamists. For example, whether a Muslim could celebrate Merry Christmas, or a Christian could celebrate *Ied Fitr* remains debatable in particular when it is seen from the Holy Scriptures. P4 stated that such religious tolerance has nothing to do with one's inner faith but it is more on a recognition that happiness belongs to anyone; thus, making someone happy is encouraged in order to achieve healthy society.

Some sentiments can often trigger unrest, which causes casualties and deaths. Often, places of worship are vandalized. Tragedy may happen suddenly due to many people lacking awareness of the meaning of tolerance in the community. (Interview with P3)

Conflict occurs in all nature, but humans can choose to resolve issues through nonviolent intervention. This can involve crafts, art, health, and education. P3 further added, "Conflict can be useful for building social harmony, and needed to raise awareness of problem solving, pushing for better and necessary changes."

Tolerance is a form of having opinions but while being freed from active bigotry (Avis, 1974, p. 1408). People who consider themselves higher, better, and truer also tend to have anti-tolerant attitudes (Widiyanto, 2017). Early in Indonesian history, the arrivals of Shi'a and Ahmadiyya were considered as enemy actions by some of the Islamic *dakwah* institutions, especially by Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia and by Persatuan Islam, which propagated the view that Ahmadiyya and Shi'a were not Islamic (Burhani, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c). Due to decades of societal integration however, now many Ahmadiyya and Shi'a followers have integrated into mainstream society. This situation indicates that even though Ahmadiyya and Shi'a are different to some extent, many Indonesians accept their presence. Similarly, the Salafi are sometimes considered weird, but they do not deviate from the core values of Islam (Colbran, 2010).

3. Interreligious Tolerance - Role of Education

Tolerance in Islam is not only for instances of discourse, but also should be a commitment to practicing it consistently. Furthermore, religious tolerance according to Islam does not mean to mix faiths of adherents of different beliefs. Nor is it to exchange beliefs between these different religious groups. The essence of tolerance is that each side is required to be able to require self-control and to provide space for respecting each other's uniqueness, without a feeling of being intimidated or threatened due to people striving for their beliefs to be practiced or for their rights to be fulfilled. Most importantly, religious tolerance is a practice that is not to be seen as a collision within the Holy Scriptures (Usman et al., 2023). There is no compulsion, as by force, to practice religion in only one

way, because forcing the will of others to convert to a certain religion is morally unacceptable. About this, P6 said:

It is really beneficial to maintain interreligious tolerance among religious communities. In doing so, we must be reasonable and not be aggressive because that offends others and is harmful. The first benefit is in avoiding being divisive.

Tolerance is an act of allowing people to exchange thoughts and values without incurring hostility. In social life, it becomes clear that the instillation of tolerance necessitates accommodating a variety of thoughts and values, considering that the community exhibits many backgrounds, including but not limited to religion, spirituality, and faith. In reality, human beings need to demonstrate their advantages in self actualization, and this occurs among people in any group. Tolerance is a must because people of different backgrounds need understanding but not disputes. To achieve this, tolerance is the key for all people (Hefner, 2020; Hutabarat, 2023; Nugraheny, 2020). Also, each human being should believe that every religion teaches virtues to its followers. There is no religion that teaches its followers to hurt their fellow humans. By maintaining harmony, our life will be peaceful and prosperous. (Interview with P8)

The second benefit of tolerance is to boost friendship. In addition to avoiding division while strengthening faith, tolerance between religious communities can enhance mutual acceptance. It can attenuate the tendency for differences to so often be the reason for conflict between one faction and another. In a group interview, P8, P9, and P10 maintained:

If human beings do not understand the meaning of tolerance, then friendship will never exist. A certain cultural group is just willing to meet with the same people and with their same culture. Such an attitude would hinder the occurrence of bonding between those different groups of people.

Another advantage is promoting peace as a consequence of tolerating people's beliefs. Every citizen should be encouraged to have a tolerant attitude to reduce tensions and conflicts that can arise in society. A tolerant attitude provides many benefits for individuals who practice it. With such a practice, an individual would seek to eradicate their own subjective dislike or prejudice toward another. Education can take role in minimizing intolerance by encouraging students to use critical thinking in their effort to creating equanimity in the school setting. By using critical thinking, multicultural education, antiracist education, and critical pedagogy, the various academic fields can help learners who feel oppressed to build self-confidence through a perspective that attributes addressed to them are merely social constructs (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Being asked whether greeting a Christian on a Christmas day is allowed or not, P5 stated that those who are unwilling to give a Christmas greeting are probably worried about their faith to degrade. While this has nothing to do with faith. Indeed, this can be a blessing because they want to make others happy. The participant concluded that there is no exclusive faith, and there is no religion which teaches the followers to practice exclusivity; all religions encourage the followers to respect those who have a different faith.

During the focus group discussion, it is concluded that, for many Muslims, to say Merry Christmas to Christians is acceptable because this is not a worship ritual nor a religious teaching practice. Participants who disagreed with that practice did not blame the agreed. Freedom to express good words to people who are celebrating their holydays is worthy.

4. Tolerance and Harmony - Role of *Pancasila*

Religious harmony is an important to the national interest of every country. Religious harmony is a condition of interreligious relations being grounded in mutual understanding and respect, which is respect for the experience of religious teachings and for cooperation in the life of society and nation. In Indonesia, the construct of state is based on *Pancasila* and the Constitution of 1945. Thus, the harmony of life for disparate religious believers is a precondition that must be manifested for positive national development (Ali, 1975, p. 42).

With regard to interreligious harmony in relation to the life of the nation and state, Rev. Weinata Sairin (2006) said:

Harmony between religious communities in Indonesia is the only option. As a nation we emphasize defending the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) which is based on *Pancasila* and the Constitution 1945. We are also determined to continue to build our society, nation, and state, so that it becomes an advanced and modern nation without losing our personality. In this context, religions have a vital and decisive place and role in our lives as a nation, as a society, and as a state. (p. 183)

In the nation's ideology, *Pancasila* has five pillars, and the first is the Oneness of God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*), by which each religious follower believes in God according to their doctrine. The significant role of *Pancasila* is to unify the commonalities of each religion for the nation's resilience against separatism, radicalism, anti-democracy, and anarchy (Bourchier, 2019). Thereby, no one can merely subjectively claim that his or her religion is superior to the other. Pg commented about this concept of tolerance:

We shall all bear a concern whether imported transnational ideology can threaten *Pancasila*, or whether there is a misunderstanding of it.

Promoting unity among individuals in the religious communities is necessary. Over time, *Pancasila* has demonstrated the capacity to be a role model to guide and unify, also to accommodate citizenry's aspirations. *Pancasila* has proven itself to help connect all people, regardless of their religious, political, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. *Pancasila* also serves as a platform allowing individuals to coexist and work together for building the country and achieving its national goals amid its ideals (Ismail, 2018). But relations between religious believers may at times become problematic, with some incidents resulting in overt hostility and even destruction of public assets. Such unrest is linked to inter-religious friction and sensitive issues, but the religious community seeks to maintain harmony. As a framework of fostering and maintaining harmony, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has over time developed a three-harmony approach, namely internal religious harmony,

interreligious harmony, and interreligious harmony with the government (Sopyan et al., 2020).

The task of manifesting harmony between believers is a collective responsibility of all religious communities, along with the government. Every individual and religious group in a community needs to understand the wisdom of harmony. It is then clear that people must practice tolerance, especially for adherents of differing religions. With a cooperative spirit, the intention should be to enhance one's own faith by tolerance for a different faith because interreligious ties are important for strengthening the integrity of the nation. This viewpoint is marked by the way that Indonesia's government has promoted religious harmony through its three-harmony approach (Sopyan et al., 2020).

I usually chat with friends of other faiths about common things that we all encounter such as lack of education, how spirituality is used to address those who are victims of drugs, as well as how values of common spirituality can unite all of us from different faiths, and it has not to do with religious sentiment. (Interview with P11)

5. Evidence-Based Practice

Humans are created as individual beings and to be social beings. People need relationships and interactions for fulfilling their needs, both material and spiritual. Tolerance between religious communities is a wise attitude toward recognizing differences without rancor. "The differences even occur in human environments that have to do with skin colors, languages, cultures, or aspirations", said P11. But when each person respects the other, both can maintain mutual relationships. This is expressed in a well-known everyday saying: "There is belief that a trust in God would be meaningless if it were not reflected in loving human beings" (Muhajarah & Soebahar, 2024). Additionally, there is no real substance to pledging belief in God if the adherent does not respect equality among people. Thus, an essential aspect in social life is a tolerant attitude toward our fellow human beings.

P1 stated that tolerant attitude is supposed to be in everyone's mind because no one is perfect. P1, amid tens of friends in campus, always comes across students of different backgrounds and of different parts of Indonesia with variety of foods, languages, and cultures. When people of different cultures and traditions meet together with the absence of mutual understanding, conflict can sometimes occur. P1 asserted:

Most of the time I meet friends coming from other Islands whose custom looks differently from what I have as a Javanese. For example, when talking, some of them speak with loud voice, especially those who come from Sumatra or eastern Indonesia. I understand this is their habit and not expressions of anger or something. While most Javanese that I know speak more softly with lower tone. We cannot contrast these two different habits and judge that one is better than the other; but what we can do is to understand the difference and respect each other. This is a true aspect of tolerance.

There are needs for reflection on tolerance, including peace as a goal of life. Tolerance is the method of developing life skills for fair human empowerment. This is the starting point for human beings to be aware that persuasive tolerance is not only via

discourse, but also via concrete action. In terms of attitude, to tolerate people requires the initiative of an individual or of a group to promote peace and inclusion of the other. In addition, at the group level, the tolerant attitude takes an initiative to build small groups in a community to implement interfaith collaboration, and this can be shaped by grassroots community organizing. This can be, for example, a small group that initiates local participation to address issues that can improve the local environment. Tolerance leads to being open to the beauty of differences; and this requires human creativity for developing society, even amid myriad religion and culture, by allowing a flexible structure (Shragge, 2013).

The seed of tolerance is love, for without love, human tolerance cannot be truly implemented. People with strongly tolerant attitudes are those who can firmly take care of humanity. They show benevolence and love in order to help people who are in need. Of this, P12 mentioned that where there is no love, there can be no tolerance. Those who have respect for, and do good for others, and for situations, are tolerant people. Tolerance means the ability to face a difficult situation wherein there is disagreement, and then to “let it be” by not insisting on one’s on viewpoint. Tolerance in life’s moments of attitudinal discomfort is achieved by letting go, taking it easy, and not trying to win on every issue.

With regard to public relations, Islam suggests each person to do good and be fair to all people, regardless of their religions. There is a moral obligation to help neighbours who are in difficulties, even if those neighbours do not share the same faith. Also, recognizing the existence of other religions is not to be seen as acknowledging the truth of religions other than Islam. Muslims can demonstrate goodwill and respect toward people of other religions to the extent that those others do not disrupt principles of Islamic faith or disrupt such worship or disparage such faith. Q.S. Al-Mumtahanah [60]: (8) even encourages Muslims to do good and bring justice to those who are of other faiths. The verse applies to all people, including Jews, Christians, Buddhist, Zoroasters, Atheistics, and Hindus. P12 commented about this by saying that while tolerance comprises recognizing the existence of other religions, this duty is not the same as acknowledging the validity of other religions.

Conclusion

To build a pluralistic society, recognizing the importance of tolerance is significant, especially in the milieu of education. Tolerance maintenance, such as acceptance of differences, recognition of culture uniqueness like foods, languages, arts, and customs, is considered significant as a manifestation of assertiveness and understandings of the difference. These are in accordance with the findings and the theory that says tolerance is synonymous with accommodation of views and feelings diversity, and of the need for adherents to worship, along with encouragements for mutual help and social care among fellow citizens. All of which consequently manifests in a strong sense of social unity and harmony. In addition, tolerant society allows its members to practice their belief and teach religious values, such as respect for others, and the awareness of no absolute truth can be claimed by a certain group of people. Tolerance also means that anyone can express their

opinions, wishes, and feelings to people within the group and to other communities without any obstacles or barriers. Importantly, tolerance can be manifested in the religious practices in which adherents of a religion are not interfered with public order and public interests. Practically speaking, tolerance functions side-by-side with religious values, spirituality, cultural virtues, and local wisdom.

Tolerance among differing religious communities is embodied as the respect for each person to function amid differences in society. A diversity of religions thus requires people to maintain a conducive, safe, and peaceful atmosphere for people of other religions to carry out worship in their chosen religious teachings without being hindered or demeaned. The Indonesian Constitution of 1945 has guaranteed the freedom to embrace any religion and to speak freely within a constitutional basis. Moreover, Indonesia has put all official religions in a status of societal recognition. The varied adherents are exercising their beliefs amid tolerant attitudes, and without being forbidden when it comes to social relations, mutual cooperation, community service, and religious activities. This creates and maintains harmony of the many tonalities of belief and rituals, and thus promotes peace in society, nation, and state. And any torture or eviction of minority faith groups in Indonesia is a firmly against the laws, against the national spirit, and would clearly violate the Constitution of 1945. Many literature studies mentioned torture experienced by Shi'a and Ahmadiyya groups in Indonesia, and the so-called mainstreaming Muslims who claimed that these two groups are deviants were behind it. The Shi'a and Ahmadiyya were even evicted from their community, properties were violated, and houses were burned down. The participants mentioned that to be tolerant one needs not to challenge the majority, instead stay silent and try to understand and embrace the differences. The student participants described that they encounter different culture in campus, but they always face it with openness and appropriate adaptation to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

Implications for Religious Education: Education can be a key factor for intolerant practices to exist or not, as Baidhawry (2006) argued, and there has been a paradigm shift on the attitudes of schools toward their students. Some teachers from a predominant religion are less likely to help students understand how to live harmoniously with the minority. Such a situation may sow seeds of bigotry and thereby allow students profess a superiority for their beliefs (Baidhawry, 2006; Wadley, 2024). Another reason for disharmony and intolerance occurrence is the lack of understanding on how to behave ethically and proportionally either to the majority or the minority. Indeed, what always happens is the majority's lack of understanding to the minority. Because of this, schools should design curricula contents that prioritize loving, or un-radicalizing. The fact that some schools have transnational ideology roots, such as the Salafi, influences children's education, which might have deprived native cultures' well-being amid institutional dominance (Anshori, 2019; Formen & Nuttall, 2016; Bruinessen, 2002). These causes have affected the nation's commitment to embrace *Pancasila* as the state's ideology and the nation's ideal of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, or unity in diversity (Pedersen, 2016; Rohman & Lessy, 2017). Education, and especially religious education, take notable roles in conducting peace via the curricula it shares with the students in the classroom. Religious education has

become more resourceful for instilling tolerant attitudes in students, so they can value solidarity, peace, and friendship when interacting with their fellow students in school and at home. This impacts greatly on the children as social beings who will eventually be part of the larger society and will work in jobs with many diverse peers.

Because of pedagogical strategy lack in schools and universities, the research recommends three important points: (1) due to the number of people throughout Indonesia coming to Java Island, especially Yogyakarta, to study, a multicultural-based education should be given in schools and universities to promote respectful life society. (2) Because of the significance of the curricula prioritizing equality in everyday life, and of the participants' silence while mingling with the majority as discovered in this research, there should be a teaching that educates the majority to respect others whose background, ethnic, faith, or culture are different, regardless the group size. (3) Promoting and introducing tolerance in religious-based education schools are essential so that fanaticism and radicalism can be minimized or eradicated. In addition, the introduction of Indonesian cultures and ethics, such as tolerance and respect to the others would be useful among students of all stages.

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