

The Concept of Multicultural Education in Efforts to Prevent Religious Conflict in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to analyze the concept of multicultural education in efforts to prevent religious conflicts in Indonesia. The approach taken is library research, where the study is conducted by collecting data or scientific writings that are literary in nature. The data collection method in this research is derived from the sources used, meaning that the data sources are the subjects from which the information is obtained. The results of the discussion mentioned that efforts to prevent religious conflict in Indonesia, first, to unite differences and attitudes. Second, building the structure of religious understanding. Third, religious development policy resolution. Fourth, resolution of social conflict / violence expectation expectations. With this concept, it is expected to increase their awareness so that they always behave humanist, pluralist, and democratic.

INTRODUCTION

It should be acknowledged that Indonesia is a pluralistic country in terms of religion and beliefs. This diversity brings two potentials, both positive and negative. On one hand, diversity contributes positively because various beliefs serve as sources of values and local wisdom that support national unity. The variety of religions practiced by the community functions as a binding force and strengthens the foundation of the nation. However, on the other hand, religious differences can also be a source of disintegration, considering the conflicts that may arise as a result (Syukron, 2017).

The cultural diversity that Indonesia possesses is a valuable asset for the nation, but on the other hand, it also carries the potential for conflict. Conflicts that often arise are related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup issues (SARA). However, the main triggers of these conflicts more often stem from economic disparities, social injustices, and political issues. Conceptually, the significant potential for conflict in Indonesia's plural society, both in terms of demographics and sociology, is caused by the fragmentation of society into groups based on cultural identities (Rahayu and Jayusman, 2016).

The emergence of stereotypes that one group holds against another group with different religions often becomes a trigger for interfaith conflicts, which can escalate into attacks, killings, the burning of places of worship, and important locations for each adherent. In recent decades, there has been a tendency for some followers of other religions to stereotype Muslims negatively, viewing them as a radical, intolerant group that is highly subjective in judging the truth of other religions. On the other hand, Christians are often seen as an aggressive and ambitious group, with a tendency to dominate various aspects of life and seeking to spread the teachings of Jesus (Yunus, 2014).

It is truly disheartening what is happening to Indonesian society today, which has resulted in a decline in the quality of life of the nation. This decline is also reflected in the increasingly low quality of Indonesian human resources. This mirrors the inadequate quality of education in Indonesia. The reform movement aimed at building a new Indonesian society demands quality and equitable education, particularly concerning the expected outcomes of education. To achieve quality education, active participation from various stakeholders is needed, including the community, education practitioners, educators, the government, and the creation of a social atmosphere and conditions that foster understanding and respect for one another. This social atmosphere has an indirect but significant impact on the success of any educational system. Until now, the direction of our education system remains unclear in determining a framework that aligns with Indonesia's vision and the development of the national education system (Santi, 2016).

Regarding this phenomenon, several questions arise: What is happening with religion in Indonesia? Does religion truly serve as a legitimacy for conflict and violence, even terrorism? Does religion function as a source of problems or rather as a solution? What if interfaith conflicts continue in a diverse country? Such questions naturally emerge, considering that adherents of various religions have long claimed that their faith carries a mission of peace for the world.

Based on the explanation above, the aim of this research is to analyze the concept of multicultural education as an effort to prevent the occurrence of religious conflicts in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature highlights the dual nature of Indonesia's religious and cultural diversity, presenting both opportunities and challenges. Syukron (2017) emphasizes that while diversity fosters national unity through shared values and local wisdom, it also poses risks of disintegration, particularly when religious differences spark conflicts. Similarly, Rahayu and Jayusman (2016) note that issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) often intersect with economic disparities, social injustices, and political grievances, exacerbating societal fragmentation. Interfaith conflicts, as Yunus (2014) observes, are frequently fueled by negative stereotypes, with Muslims often perceived as radical and intolerant, while Christians are stereotyped as dominant and proselytizing. These tensions have resulted in violent incidents, such as attacks on places of worship, and highlight the urgent need for solutions to foster interfaith harmony. Additionally, Santi (2016) underscores the role of education in addressing these challenges, advocating for a system that promotes mutual understanding and respect as integral to improving the quality of human resources in Indonesia. Against this backdrop, the concept of multicultural education emerges as a critical approach to mitigating religious conflicts, offering a framework for fostering peace and unity in a pluralistic society.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of its type, this research employs a library research method, which involves collecting data or scholarly writings that serve as the research objects related to literature. The data collection method in this study is derived from data sources, meaning that the data sources in this research are the subjects from which the information is obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Multicultural Education

Multicultural education can be defined as the study of cultural diversity, human rights, and efforts to reduce or eliminate various forms of prejudice in order to create a fair and harmonious community life. Simply put, multiculturalism refers to the existence of more than two cultures. Etymologically, the term multiculturalism is derived from the combination of the words multi, cultural, and ism, which respectively mean many, culture, and doctrine/ideology. Therefore, multiculturalism can be understood as a doctrine or concept related to cultural diversity. Multicultural is a term that refers to an individual's perspective on the variety of life in the world, as well as cultural policies that emphasize acceptance of the diversity and various cultures (multicultural) present in society. This encompasses the values of systems, habits, and politics adopted by that society (Lestariningsih & Purnomo, 2018).

Regardless of the definitions provided by education experts, the reality is that Indonesia is composed of a diverse array of ethnic groups, cultures, religions, races, and languages. This country embraces the philosophy that, despite differences in ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, the shared goal is to realize a strong and resilient Indonesia, with a solid identity that is respected by other nations. The aim is to achieve the ideal aspirations of the nation's founders, which include becoming a progressive, just, prosperous, and peaceful nation. Therefore, all elements of the nation, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, and culture, need to unite to build strength in all sectors, in order to achieve shared prosperity and enhance the nation's dignity to be recognized by countries around the world (Rosyada, 2014).

Tobroni explains that multicultural education can be understood through three aspects: 1) multicultural education as a concept or idea, 2) multicultural education as a movement, and 3) multicultural education as a process. Thus, multicultural education requires in-depth study, the development of comprehensive concepts, and careful implementation (Wihardit, 2010).

The Islamic attitude towards plurality is very clear. Islam does not reject diversity; rather, it provides an ethical and constructive framework for attitudes towards it. This ethical and positive stance is reflected in various verses of the Qur'an that explicitly acknowledge the reality of pluralism. For instance, the Qur'an states that humans are created into various nations and tribes so that they may know and appreciate one another (Q.S. Al-Hujurat: 13). Furthermore, the Qur'an emphasizes that differences in language and skin color should be accepted as a positive reality and are among the signs of Allah's power (Q.S. Ar-Rum: 22). Multicultural education is highly needed for Indonesian society. It can serve as a medium to eliminate prejudice and build a sense of unity based on local culture.

Religious Conflict

Conflict originates from the Latin verb "*configere*," which means to strike against each other. In a sociological context, conflict is defined as a social process involving two or more individuals (or even groups) in which one party seeks to eliminate the other by destroying it. Meanwhile, religion can be understood as a set of values and norms of moral and spiritual teachings that underlie and guide human life, both as individuals and as part of society. Thus, religious conflict can be understood as disputes between religions, whether within the same group or with different religions.

Conflicts among religious communities have existed for a long time, in conjunction with the existence of religion itself. This phenomenon can be clearly observed through various information sources, including available archives. Religious conflicts often arise due to differences in understanding or practices carried out by adherents that deviate from the stipulations established by religious law. This is usually where such conflicts begin.

In this context, it is important to understand religious life in relation to the realities of human existence. Therefore, it is naive to consider religion as separate from all existing realities. Religion must be positioned proportionally within that context. Thus, it can be concluded that religion needs to be understood and

interpreted in the context of the diverse challenges faced by its adherents (Sularso, 2019).

There are several factors that can support the role of religion as a solution to address ongoing conflicts. First, religion should not be limited to the five faiths recognized as state religions. Every religion teaches the concept of peace, which is at the core of its teachings, with the hope that its followers will attain safety in both this world and the hereafter. The second factor is prioritizing national interests above individual or group interests. By prioritizing national interests, various conflicting interests can be minimized.

Galtung identifies three types of violence present in societal life. First, direct violence, which arises in an event without any prior planning. Second, cultural violence, which is often conveyed through religious sermons that emphasize ethnic, racial, and religious sentiments. Cultural violence is understood as a form of propaganda that contradicts goodness, love, compassion, and humanitarian values. Third, structural violence, which is carried out in an organized and well-planned manner by anarchist groups that justify such violent actions. Structural violence aims not only to build power, organize groups, and assert control but also to sow division and create disintegration within society (Takdir, 2017).

Based on the explanation above, it can be stated that religion not only provides concepts but also shapes paradigms for its followers, as this way of thinking will influence a person's actions. In this writing, there are three answers provided by religion to address conflicts in Indonesian society. First, religion does not recognize territorial boundaries; it binds its followers based on their beliefs. Second, religion establishes piety obedience as a measure of honor and strength for both individuals and groups. Lastly, religion prioritizes freedom and peace.

The Concept of Multicultural Education in Efforts to Prevent Religious Conflicts in Indonesia

Conflict is an inherent part of human life that cannot be avoided entirely throughout history. As long as humanity exists, it is almost impossible to eradicate conflict from this world. Conflicts between individuals and groups have been a part of the journey of human history. Various unfulfilled individual desires can lead to conflict. Differences in perspective between individuals can also trigger conflicts. If conflicts between individuals are not resolved fairly and proportionally, they have the potential to escalate into conflicts between groups in society. Often, a conflict begins with a small, simple issue. Differences of opinion and attitude, as well as an inability to accept others' differences, can lead to conflicts between individuals.

So how does the concept of multicultural education contribute to preventing religious conflicts in Indonesia?

Banks identifies five dimensions in multicultural education: (1) content integration, which involves incorporating various cultures and groups to explain fundamental concepts, generalizations, and theories within a subject or discipline; (2) knowledge construction processes, which help students understand the cultural impact within a subject; (3) equitable pedagogy, which adjusts teaching methods to accommodate students' learning styles, supporting

the academic achievement of diverse students in terms of race, culture, or social background; (4) prejudice reduction, which involves identifying the racial characteristics of students and applying appropriate teaching methods; and (5) empowering school culture, which aims to train groups to participate and interact with all staff and students from various ethnic and racial backgrounds to create an inclusive academic culture (Adhani, 2014).

To anticipate the occurrence of religious conflicts in Indonesia, the formulation for harmonizing interfaith relations can be carried out through the following patterns: 1) Uniting differences and attitudes, 2) Building a structure of religious understanding, 3) Resolving religious development policies, 4) Resolving expectations of conflict/social violence rooted in religion.

According to Zakiyah, in resolving interfaith conflicts, the ideal role is to act as a mediator between the conflicting parties and as a facilitator for problem resolution. There are several alternative solutions that can be implemented, namely: *First*, engaging in peacebuilding efforts, which include maintaining public order, repairing damaged infrastructure, reorganizing affected institutions, imposing sanctions on perpetrators of riots and provocateurs, and carrying out reconciliation processes. This process may involve local organizations or religious leaders, especially in cases of interfaith conflict. *Second*, developing a culture of peace through education for government employees and conducting campaigns for a democratic education system. This also involves engaging communities from various religious backgrounds, where religious leaders play a role in preventing unrest and addressing issues that arise in society. *Third*, publishing "recognition" policies, which encompass acknowledging the rights of minorities, distributing power by granting greater autonomy to these groups, and recognizing their territories. This policy prioritizes the management of ethnic diversity without erasing the differences among conflicting parties. *Fourth*, ensuring equitable economic justice for migrants and local residents in various provinces in Indonesia, for example, by implementing regulations regarding land ownership that respect customary law, as well as promoting tolerance and protecting the entire community regardless of religious background, whether they are migrants or local residents (Hapsin, 2014).

All religious groups in Indonesia, without exception, should wisely seek wisdom and learn valuable lessons from the destructive conflicts that have occurred. Exclusive attitudes, intolerance, selfishness, narrow and imbalanced interpretations of sacred texts, as well as excessive claims of truth related to the doctrines and theologies embraced by a religious community, need to be abandoned. On the contrary, the spirit of agreeing to disagree, as well as inclusive, pluralistic, humanistic, wise, and tolerant attitudes, should be prioritized in efforts to build and develop tolerance, harmony, and peaceful coexistence among religious communities in our homeland.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The concept of Multicultural Education offers an alternative in preventing religious conflicts by implementing educational strategies and approaches that utilize the diversity present in society, including ethnic, cultural, linguistic,

religious, social status, gender, ability, age, and racial diversity. The multicultural educational approach aims not only to facilitate the community's understanding of the material being taught but also to enhance their awareness to always behave in a humanitarian, pluralistic, and democratic manner.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the implementation of Multicultural Education be integrated into Indonesia's national education system as a strategic effort to prevent religious conflicts. Educational institutions should design curricula that actively incorporate and celebrate societal diversity, encompassing ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, and other dimensions. Teachers and educators should be trained to deliver this approach effectively, fostering a classroom environment that promotes pluralism, mutual respect, and democratic values. Additionally, collaboration between educational stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and religious organizations, is crucial to ensure that multicultural principles are embedded not only in formal education but also in informal and non-formal learning settings. By cultivating awareness and respect for diversity, this approach can empower individuals to act in ways that uphold humanitarian principles and contribute to social harmony, ultimately reducing the likelihood of interfaith conflicts.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future research can explore the practical implementation of Multicultural Education in various educational settings across Indonesia to assess its effectiveness in preventing religious conflicts. Studies could examine the challenges and opportunities in integrating multicultural principles into the national curriculum, teacher training programs, and community-based education initiatives. Additionally, comparative research on the application of Multicultural Education in other pluralistic societies could provide valuable insights and best practices for Indonesia. Investigating the long-term impacts of multicultural approaches on students' attitudes, behaviors, and conflict resolution skills would also contribute to a deeper understanding of its efficacy. Further research might also examine the role of technology and digital platforms in promoting multicultural awareness and fostering interfaith dialogue among diverse communities. By addressing these areas, future studies can provide more comprehensive strategies to enhance the role of education in achieving social cohesion and preventing conflicts.

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