

## Uniting Differences : Building Multicultural Awareness In Religious Schools

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### Abstract

Schools, as educational institutions that have a key role in shaping the character and values of the younger generation, have a responsibility to promote multiculturalism. However, in educational environments with a religious background, challenges can arise in efforts to promote multiculturalism without ignoring existing religious values. This research aims to examine effective strategies and approaches in instilling multicultural values in schools with a religious background. The research method used is literature reflection to explore an in-depth understanding of the concept of multiculturalism and the challenges faced by schools with a religious background. The research results show that instilling the values of multiculturalism in schools can be done through an inclusive, dialogical and religious-based approach. The integration of a multicultural curriculum that includes cultural and religious aspects from various backgrounds is an effective way to teach tolerance, respect and better understanding of differences. In addition, intercultural education that promotes interfaith dialogue, seminars, visits to places of worship, and cultural exchange programs can be a means of strengthening multicultural awareness in schools with religious backgrounds. This research also emphasizes the important role of teachers in guiding students in understanding and appreciating multiculturalism, while still recognizing the religious values they adhere to. Schools with a religious background need to create an environment that supports interfaith dialogue and encourages tolerance through inclusive educational policies and practices.

**Keywords:** *Multicultural, awareness, religious schools*

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a very diverse culture, this is shown by the many cultural variations such as customs, traditions, religions, groups, ethnicities, tribes and races. This can be a serious threat to the Indonesian nation which has various regional cultures. The uniqueness of these diverse cultures has implications for each individual's mindset, behavior and personal character as a tradition that lives in society and in the region. The existence of cultural, religious, ethnic and class differences can give rise to heterogeneous or homogeneous conflicts if they are not fortified by living with mutual respect and respect. Various social conflicts often occur, showing that cultural, religious, ethnic, tribal and racial diversity can be a factor causing conflict, both inter-religious conflict and inter-religious conflict. This is based on the lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding obtained at school. Nowadays, there is a proliferation of community-based schools, especially those with a religious background. This school with a religious background has a different concept from schools in general. The learning models and teaching concepts are also different. There are those who refer to religious groups such as NU and Muhammadiyah as the largest

religious groups in Indonesia, giving reference to their teaching model by including Aswaja subjects as the basis of NU and Muhammadiyah as the basis of Muhammadiyah. The basic instillation of this religious group can be considered quite good, but it is feared that the instillation of multiculturalism values given to students is weak because it prioritizes the basics of their group as a principle. If the value of multiculturalism is weak in its cultivation, then conflicts between religions and between religions will often occur, such as the Poso conflict where conflicts between religions occur. Apart from that, conflicts between religions also often occur, such as the emergence of acts of terrorism that use religious identity as its principle. So the role of schools as educational institutions needs to be able to instill the value of multiculturalism as a soul in all school members in accordance with the third principle of Pancasila, namely Indonesian unity and also the embodiment of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as its principle (Habibah, 2017). In relation to multicultural society, according to Fedyani (1986), quoted by Kamal (2013), the diversity of formations, namely ethnic groups, religions and other

social groups with a real characteristic, is a strong tendency to hold the identity of each social group. A strong orientation towards one's own group is a signal of the sensitivity of relations between social groups in society. This strong inward orientation is a factor that strengthens social boundaries and differences. In order to create integration in a pluralistic society, it is necessary to create a certain amount of harmony and balance as an effort to overcome the differences around them, especially in the programs implemented by schools as a form of instilling the value of multiculturalism in students. Kamal (2013) states that multiculturalism is a concept where a community in a national context can recognize cultural diversity, differences and pluralism, whether racial, ethnic, ethnic or religious. Multicultural education provides an understanding that a plural and diverse nation is a nation filled with diverse cultures (multicultural). The idea of multicultural education is seen as an idea that accommodates equality in differences and is considered capable of reducing vertical and horizontal conflicts in a heterogeneous society where demands for recognition and existence occur. Likewise, Tilaar (2004) believes that the process of minimizing conflict requires educational efforts with a multicultural perspective in order to empower a diverse and heterogeneous society so that they understand and respect each other and form characters that are open to differences.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative descriptive research design as stated by Arikunto (1998: 116) that qualitative descriptive research seeks to identify and describe phenomena that occur as they are, without any engineering elements. Data were analyzed using a descriptive analysis model through the following steps: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (4) conclusion/verification. Data reduction is selecting the necessary data and setting aside the less important ones. Next, relevant data is classified based on its type (macro, super and micro structure) and data that is less relevant is set aside. After the data has been reduced and classified, the data collected through documentation is presented according to reality in the student's essay. The final step is drawing conclusions. Based on the data description for each problem, a logical conclusion is drawn.

Then, the data that has been analyzed goes through descriptive analysis procedure steps followed by data validity techniques. Checking the validity of the data and findings is very necessary to obtain adequate results. Checking the data and findings in this research was carried out in three ways. methods, namely, (1) triangulation, (2) corpus, and (3) checking the results of data analysis. First, triangulation is analyzing the subject's answers by examining their correctness with other available empirical data (data sources). There are four types of triangulation as an examination technique to achieve validity, namely data triangulation, observer triangulation, method triangulation, and theory triangulation. Second, the validity data used in the text is compiled in the form of a data corpus. The data in corpus form needs to be checked again to determine its completeness and deficiencies. Checking the completeness and accuracy of the data is carried out as follows, namely (1) carefully reading the research data, (2) carefully observing things related to the use of language that expresses imperative meaning, and (3) conducting a search for research conducted relevant for comparison. According to Alwasilah (2002:28), discourse analysis equipped with a corpus often strengthens researchers' intuition to sharpen their sensitivity when understanding the corpus itself.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Indonesia is a plural and multicultural nation. In ethnological research, for example, it is known that Indonesia consists of approximately 600 ethnic groups with their own identities and different cultures. Apart from the lives of these tribes being concentrated in certain areas, there is also a concentration of tribes in other places due to migration or rapid population mobilization. Through the 2000 census, 101 ethnic groups were recorded in Indonesia with a total population of 201,092,238 people as citizens (Suryadinata cs, 2003: 102). Since the 19th century, religions have emerged in a formative phase characterized by efforts to formulate teachings and education that were deemed suitable to the challenges that emerged at that time. The establishment of relations with

religious centers abroad led to the emergence of religious purification movements. Orthodoxy then became a prominent feature. For example, Christianity has become synonymous with the West, as well as Islam being more oriented towards the Arab world, Hinduism towards India, and Buddhism towards Sri Lanka or Thailand. This purification process is often also filled with external problems in the form of historical and theological problems within the country. In turn, these import problems can become latent problems and difficult to find solutions to. As an example, the bitter historical stigma about the Crusades has also emerged in Indonesia. Historical grudges, hatred and enmity can resurface when stories about wars that have lasted for centuries are read in the context of wrong understanding. Likewise, wars that occurred between Protestants and Catholics in European history could also cause the same trauma and bring back negative religious prejudices. Pluralism must be found in every community. Especially at this time, when transportation and communication technology has achieved rapid progress. Plurality is an inevitable destiny at the global level as well as at the nation-state and community level. Technically and technologically, we have been able to live together in a pluralistic society. However, spiritually we do not yet understand the true meaning of living together with people who have different cultures, which include differences in religion, ethnicity and social class. Indonesia has ethnic diversity. This ethnic diversity is one of the characteristics of Indonesian society that we can be proud of. However, without us realizing, this pluralism also holds the potential for conflict that can threaten the life of the nation and state. This has been proven in several regions of Indonesia where conflicts occur, such as in Sampit (between Madurese and Dayak tribes), in Poso (between Christians and Muslims), in Aceh (between GAM and RI), or fights that often occur between villages in several areas on the island. Java and student fights between schools. To minimize the above, schools must instill the values of togetherness, tolerance and being able to adapt to various differences. The educational process in this direction can be pursued with

multicultural education. Multicultural education is a process of cultivating a way of life that is respectful, sincere and tolerant towards the cultural diversity that lives in a plural society. With multicultural education, it is hoped that the nation will have mental flexibility in facing social conflicts. In this context, awareness of multiculturalism or pluralism then becomes a very important value. Early on, it is necessary to differentiate between two terms that are similar: "plurality" and "pluralism." Because quite a few groups often confuse the use of these two terms. Plurality is a fact about diversity that exists naturally and based on natural laws: race, skin color, ethnicity, religion, culture, gender and so on.

Plurality, therefore, is not a choice but God's gift to humans. That's because there is nothing wrong with plurality. The question then is: how does one respond to this diversity? The formulation of answers to these questions will give rise to pluralism. Therefore, pluralism here cannot be understood simply by saying that our society is plural, diverse, consisting of various ethnicities and religions, which actually only depicts the impression of fragmentation, not pluralism (Habibah, 2022; Habibah et al., 2018). Pluralism should also not be understood simply as a "negative good", only judging from its use in getting rid of fanaticism (to keep fanaticism at bay). On the other hand, pluralism - as very well described by Nurcholish Madjid (1999: 7) - must be understood as "genuine engagement of diversity within the bonds of civility". Therefore, pluralism is an attitude that recognizes and appreciates, respects, maintains, and even develops or enriches situations that are plural, plural or diverse. In the context of inter-religious theology, for example, pluralism builds a postulate: that at the heart of all authentic religions and traditions have the same message of truth, namely that we all come from and will return to the same destination: to the Absolute, the Beginning-the End, the Holy Gious. or in theology it is called God (Sabri : 2012 , 25). Based on the understanding above, it illustrates that in this country, pluralism can be seen not only in terms

of religion but also culture and language. If you remember the many differences that exist in Indonesia, this is a polemic about the frequent occurrence of radicalism. Cases of radicalism that often occur are caused by many religions that do not pay attention to the social side of their surroundings so that religious principles become the main thing. Even though Indonesia has a view of unity in diversity which is used as a guideline for the pluralism of the Indonesian nation among the differences that occur, whether religious, ethnic, racial and cultural. Multicultural education should be implemented in the world of education as an effort to minimize the occurrence of these conflicts. The cultivation of multiculturalism education should have been implemented long ago because transnational principles have begun to enter Indonesia to become a new perspective. The introduction of other cultures is important for students to know in order to deepen students' knowledge about the meaning of differences as well as deepen the meaning of unity that has been taught by heroes. According to Zamroni (2011), multicultural education is proposed to be used as an instrument of social engineering through formal education, meaning that school institutions must play a role in instilling awareness of life in a multicultural society and developing attitudes of tolerance and tolerance to realize the needs and ability to cooperate with all existing differences. The process of instilling multicultural values in schools with a religious background can be implemented through the cross-cultural humanity program. Cross culture humanity is an exchange of community cultures that is used to introduce each other's cultures (Frambach et al., 2012). Religion is a part of culture that has different learning, so there is a lot of beauty when exploring the life of the Indonesian nation. However, recently there have been many conflicts in the name of religion as a tool for carrying out radicalism and doctrine in several communities, therefore there needs to be a way that can minimize the occurrence of radicalism from an early age, starting from the world of education or schools, especially those with a religious background. Cross culture humanity can be developed in several forms of programs as an effort to minimize conflict, including: a. Anti-

Difference Seminar Multicultural contexts are often difficult to instill only through learning. Apart from the lack of material and students only know theoretically. Apart from that, the mindset that students receive from their parents is that a certain religion is perfect. Therefore, seminars with anti-difference material should be programmed by each school to instill multiculturalism in students. A seminar concept that can foster anti-difference attitudes is a seminar modeled on a talk show. Talk shows can make it easier to build interactions between the audience and the presenter. The objectives of implementing the anti-difference seminar program are as follows: 1. Students will love the differences that occur around them more, remembering that the differences that exist are not only religious levels but also different groups. 2. Students will be able to appreciate differences, it is hoped that students will not only respond to differences but also able to respect, behave and open-minded in carrying out social activities in any form. b. Development of Multicultural Education in Civics and Religion Subjects The cultivation of multicultural education at the school level still cannot be implemented as a separate subject like in universities, this is because there are several subjects that are relevant to multicultural education, namely the subjects of Pancasila and Citizenship Education and Religious Education Islam. Actually, the subject of History is also relevant, but this subject only discusses how conditions in the past formed the differences that exist in Indonesia. The relevance of Pancasila and Citizenship Education to multiculturalism education actually begins with the many new ideologies that have entered the Indonesian nation by bringing doctrines that violate the ideology of the Indonesian nation, namely Pancasila (Habibah et al., n.d.). The entry of this new ideology brings religious ideology which is used as doctrine to society and puts aside the differences that exist in our country. The impact of the introduction of this new ideology resulted in confusion in some communities regarding the truth of the ideology they adhered to. Regarding the ideology of the Indonesian nation, seen from the perspective of Pancasila ideology, it actually depicts a symbol of respect for

differences, namely the first principle, namely belief in the one and only God. The meaning of the first is that it does not refer to one religious group but to all religions in Indonesia . Therefore, if a new ideology is introduced that brings religious groups, it will result in a gap in the ideology of a nation. Therefore, the importance of developing material in the Civics subject is to find out in real terms the conditions of differences that exist, whether visiting schools that use schools with different religious backgrounds. The aim is for all school members to understand how schools with different backgrounds apply multiculturalism to all their citizens. According to Iis Arifudin in the journal *Insaniah* (2007), multicultural education does not have to stand alone, but can be integrated into the subjects and educational processes in schools, including the example of teachers and adults in schools. Therefore, multicultural education must include matters relating to tolerance, ethno-cultural and religious differences, the dangers of discrimination, conflict resolution and mediation, human rights, democracy and plurality, universal humanity, and other relevant subjects leading to the formation of a civil society. love peace and respect differences. The content of multicultural education must be implemented in the form of actions , both in schools and in society. In order for individuals to be able to interact with others in their living environment, they need to be equipped with the ability to exist and be able to adapt to existing diversity, as well as upholding the values of shared life. Thus, they are able to accept differences, and not a priori towards differences. To be able to have such an attitude to life, multicultural education is needed because multicultural education is expected to be the best solution in dealing with existing diversity, whether culture, religion, ethnicity, social status, and so on. Therefore, it is very important for education in schools, both general and religiously based, to provide multicultural education and implement it through various means in the educational process. The development of religious education is one of the subjects that should be able to reduce the religious conflicts that have recently occurred from an early age.

Remembering that this subject not only teaches how to study a particular religion but how to respect other religions and also respond to it so that there is a balance between one's spirituality and spirituality. The multicultural education process through these subjects should not only show halal and haram but also how students love differences. This problem is actually taken from the harmony of the 4 religious communities in Pancasila village, Pancasila district. This harmony is depicted by enlivening the big day of each religion, which is used as a moment to chat and mingle in happiness regarding differences in sharia matters but social harmony. Therefore, the development of material in religious education does not only focus on one religious group but also describes how to behave with other religions. In this way, steps to prevent radicalism from an early age can be realized in all schools, especially those with a religious background. Islamic education is based on the assumption that humans are born in a state of nature, namely with innate potential such as faith, the potential to assume trust and responsibility, the potential for intelligence and perfect physical potential. With these potentials, humans are able to develop actively and interactively with their environment and with the help of other people or educate deliberately so that they become Muslim humans who are able to interact well with fellow creatures and are able to become caliphs and serve Allah SWT. This is due to several limitations that are difficult for schools with a religious background to solve, including:

- a. Mindset of students from different religions
- b. Justice in providing religious learning
- c. There is still a family mindset that one religion, for example Islam or Christianity, is the perfect religion.

In accordance with research conducted by Nafis (2014) that in implementing multicultural education, there are still those who are anti-multiculturalism education in the Al-Muayyad High School environment, for example in the dormitory environment. there is a warning board that says hijab area. From here we can see that there is fanaticism on the part of the hostel under the pretext of upholding Islamic law. But the evaluation that enters the women's dormitory area is not only people who wear the hijab, not

even all Muslim women. Apart from that, students have difficulty socializing, especially students from outside Java, so they tend to create their own communities. It is feared that this could hinder the application of multicultural education by educators. With the Islamic boarding school system, students are required to live in the school dormitory during their education period, this results in very little socialization of students with the outside world, so it is feared that students will tend to have individualistic or indifferent personalities. (Nafis, 2014:10)

## CONCLUSION

Based on the presentation of the results of the research that has been carried out, it was found that in the implementation of education in schools with a religious background, there is still a low level of instilling the values of multiculturalism, especially in schools with a religious background, for example, the acceptance of students still uses people from other religions, not non-religions. There needs to be an appeal from relevant institutions to provide demands to be able to implement ways of respecting differences in order to create a state that has the principles and ideology of Pancasila.

In conclusion, instilling the values of multiculturalism in schools with a religious background is a necessity to create a more inclusive and tolerant society. This can be achieved through the integration of a multicultural curriculum, intercultural education, as well as the active role of teachers and school policies that support multiculturalism. In this way, schools can become agents of change that encourage a better understanding of cultural and religious diversity in society.

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