

The Role of Islam in Building Interfaith Tolerance in Indonesia

Susi Apriudianisti¹

¹ STIT Palapa Nusantara Lombok NTB, Indonesia
Email: susiapriudi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Indonesia, as a country with diverse religions, cultures, and ethnicities, faces challenges in maintaining social harmony. Interfaith tolerance is a key factor in creating a peaceful and prosperous life. Islam, as the majority religion in Indonesia, plays a significant role in fostering tolerance through its teachings that emphasize compassion (rahmah), wisdom (hikmah), and justice. This study aims to analyze the role of Islam in building interfaith tolerance in Indonesia through a literature review. The method used is a qualitative literature study, examining various primary and secondary sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and previous research. The findings show that Islam contributes to building tolerance through education, preaching, and religious institutional policies. The role of religious counselors, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and preachers (da'i) is crucial in instilling tolerance within society. Additionally, cooperation between Islamic organizations and the government in formulating policies on religious moderation strengthens social harmony. However, challenges such as radicalism and the spread of hoaxes still hinder the realization of ideal tolerance. Therefore, a more comprehensive strategy is needed to strengthen Islam's role as an agent of tolerance in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with vast diversity in religion, culture, and ethnicity. This diversity reflects the social wealth that can be a strength for the nation, but it also has the potential to cause conflicts if not managed well (Anjani & Kosasih, 2024). Therefore, interfaith tolerance becomes one of the most important aspects in maintaining social harmony in Indonesia. Islam, as the majority religion, has a strategic role in building and maintaining a tolerant attitude in a multicultural society.

Tolerance in Islam is not just about accepting differences, but also involves respecting and appreciating the existence of other religions. This concept aligns with fundamental Islamic teachings such as rahmah (compassion), hikmah (wisdom), and justice. In practice, various Islamic institutions, including religious counselors, educators, and preachers (da'i), actively play a role in spreading the values of tolerance through preaching, education, and social activities (Emlita et al., 2024; Melisa et al., 2024).

From the above explanation, it can be understood that to strengthen the spirit of tolerance, humans must maintain good relationships with others. Preserving bonds of human affection based on humanity is an important part of the human journey. As God's representatives on earth,

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Susi Apriudianisti

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Keruak, Lombok Timur, NTB,

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humans can carry out a very important role to ensure that relationships between people are not distorted by group and faction interests. Filling the void of humanity with tolerance is a human duty amidst the struggles of life that are often full of conflicting interests (Name et al., 2023).

Indonesia is a country with high diversity in religion, ethnicity, and culture. This diversity demands a strong tolerance attitude among its people to create a harmonious and peaceful life. Tolerance is a key determinant in creating peaceful coexistence among religious communities. However, the reality shows a tendency from some Muslim groups to develop an exclusive religious pattern (Naim, 2020). Therefore, the role of Islam in building interfaith tolerance becomes an important issue to explore.

Religious harmony is a relationship based on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, and appreciation of equality in religious practices. Furthermore, this harmony also includes cooperation in community, national, and state life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Good cooperation will be realized when adherents of different religions respect differences, help each other, and are able to unify their views, or in other words, have a tolerant attitude (Rahman, 2019).

Religious tolerance education is one of the solutions to overcome conflicts and violence in Indonesia. Religious tolerance education must be instilled from an early age, starting from when children are still in school. Religious tolerance education can be conducted through various activities, such as direct learning, discussions, simulations, and written works. Religious tolerance education is an investment for the future, aimed at creating a more peaceful and harmonious society (Pahrudin et al., 2023).

In Islamic history, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) set an example in building tolerance among his companions. Internal tolerance is a foundation for external tolerance. The Prophet Muhammad (SAW) described interfaith harmony with the analogy of a single body, where if one part is in pain, the whole body feels the pain. Additionally, it is important to avoid anything that can cause division. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari emphasized that there is no benefit in division, only disaster, difficulties, and failure. Therefore, building cohesion and tolerance is the primary choice in a pluralistic society (Anandari, 2022).

Differences in various forms, whether in skin color, language, opinions, or beliefs, are a part of the universal laws established by Allah SWT. This is emphasized in the Qur'an: "Had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind one community; but they continue to differ, except those on whom your Lord has mercy. And for that did He create them" (Hasbi, 2011). Awareness of group unity can be a great strength to build a strong and progressive collective life. Diversity should be seen as a strength for building an inclusive community, not as a trigger for conflict (Nirwana & Rais, 2019).

Shari'ah in Islam recommends remaining consistent in participating with fellow humans to unite in actualizing brotherhood and consultation to achieve a balanced life that refers to the principle of moderation (*ummatan wasathan*). Islam teaches the importance of preserving diversity among believers, whether those who share the same faith or those with differing beliefs, in both worship practices and views on divinity (Samsu & Jamal, 2023). Religion can also serve as a dialogue platform in social life to create social harmony and peace. In this context, the role of religion in resolving community conflicts can take the form of preventive, persuasive, and educational actions to build interfaith cooperation in social, national, and state life (Saefulloh et al., 2022).

The concept of religious harmony in Indonesia has long been a focus of attention. The term "religious harmony" was first introduced by the Minister of Religious Affairs, K.H. M. Dachlan, in

his opening speech at the Interfaith Dialogue on November 30, 1967. He emphasized that interfaith harmony was an absolute condition for achieving political and economic stability in Indonesia (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018). Religious harmony is very important in a pluralistic society because without tolerance, the nation will face various conflicts that have the potential to cause national disintegration. Therefore, Islam views interfaith harmony as a necessity that must be maintained in community life (Bakar & Hurmain, 2016).

Tolerance is "the quality or attitude of being patient and respecting others' views, beliefs, customs, etc., that are different or contrary to one's own." Terminologically, tolerance is defined as the attitude of listening to and respecting the opinions and positions of others (Yusuf Faisal Ali, 2017).

In Islamic teachings, tolerance not only applies between humans but also towards nature and the environment. Religious tolerance is one aspect that is highly regarded in Islam, considering that human beliefs in Allah are sensitive and primordial. Islam asserts that the diversity of religions and beliefs is the will of Allah SWT. In the Qur'an, Allah SWT says: "Had your Lord willed, He would have made all the people of the earth believers. Will you then force people to become believers?" (Witrianto, 2016). Therefore, Islam does not aim to abolish other religions, but rather offers dialogue and tolerance in the form of mutual respect.

Several previous studies have addressed the role of Islam in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia, highlighting the importance of the role of religious counselors in instilling tolerance values through preaching and community guidance. In the context of education, (Melisa et al., 2024) showed that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a significant role in instilling tolerant attitudes in students in schools. Additionally, (Emlita et al., 2024) emphasized the role of da'i in raising social and spiritual awareness within communities through sermons and religious activities.

Although many studies have reviewed aspects of tolerance in Islam, there are still gaps in the research concerning more effective strategies for strengthening Islam's role as a tolerance agent on a national scale. Furthermore, further exploration is needed regarding the involvement of various actors, such as religious institutions and the government, in fostering religious harmony in Indonesia.

Based on the literature review, there are several research gaps that this study aims to fill. First, many studies have focused on a single aspect of tolerance, such as education or the role of da'i, but have not integrated other approaches involving additional actors. Second, existing studies have mostly used case study approaches in specific regions, which do not provide a broader perspective on how Islam can serve as a catalyst for national tolerance.

This study offers a more holistic perspective by examining various aspects of Islam's role in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. Through a literature review approach, this research combines previous findings to develop a more comprehensive strategy for building religious harmony.

This study aims to answer the main question: How does Islam play a role in building and strengthening interfaith tolerance in Indonesia? More specifically, the study aims to: 1) Examine the role of religious counselors, PAI teachers, and da'i in fostering tolerance in society; 2) Identify effective strategies for strengthening interfaith tolerance based on Islamic teachings; and 3) Propose a model for the involvement of various parties, including religious institutions and the government, in maintaining social harmony through an Islamic approach.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of policies related to religious tolerance in Indonesia, both in the education sector and within the wider

community. Moreover, this study can serve as a reference for academics, preaching practitioners, and the government in formulating more effective strategies for maintaining interfaith harmony in Indonesia. Thus, this research holds both academic value and practical implications for religious and community life.

Based on the explanation above, this study aims to examine the role of Islam in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia through a literature review. By understanding the concept and implementation of tolerance in Islamic teachings, this research is expected to contribute to the creation of a harmonious and inclusive society.

METHOD

This study used the literature review method with a qualitative approach. A literature review is a research method that was conducted by collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing various literatures relevant to the topic discussed. This research was descriptive-qualitative, using secondary data obtained from various written sources, such as books, scholarly journals, academic articles, and official documents related to the role of Islam in building interfaith tolerance in Indonesia.

The data sources in this study consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included the Qur'an, Hadith, as well as the thoughts of scholars and Muslim intellectuals related to the concept of tolerance in Islam. Meanwhile, secondary sources included books, scholarly journals, research reports, and articles that discussed interfaith tolerance in the context of Islam and Indonesia. To obtain relevant data, this study applied the documentation study technique, which involved searching, reading, and analyzing available literature. The search process was conducted through various sources, both print and digital, including academic journal databases, institutional repositories, and scholarly articles.

The data obtained was analyzed using content analysis, with the main stages including data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by sorting and selecting literature that aligned with the focus of the research. Next, data presentation was done by categorizing the findings based on main themes, such as the concept of tolerance in Islam, the role of Islam in building tolerance in Indonesia, and the factors influencing interfaith relationships. Finally, this study drew conclusions from various sources of literature to provide a synthesis regarding the role of Islam in building interfaith tolerance in Indonesia.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study employed the source triangulation technique, which involved comparing various literatures from different authors and perspectives. In addition, the literature used consisted of trustworthy academic sources that had undergone peer-review processes. With this approach, the study aimed to provide a deep understanding of the role of Islam in building interfaith tolerance in Indonesia based on a comprehensive literature review.

RESULTS

Tolerance is one of the determinant aspects in creating peaceful coexistence among religious communities. However, the reality shows a tendency among certain groups of Muslims who develop an exclusive way of practicing their religion (Naim, 2020). Interfaith harmony is a relationship based on tolerance, mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation in social, national, and state life within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which is grounded in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (Muhdina, 2015). Good cooperation will be realized if religious followers feel mutually dependent, respect differences, and have a tolerant attitude (Rahman, 2019).

One of the steps taken by Prophet Muhammad SAW in fostering tolerance was creating harmony among his companions. He described their relationship as one body: if one part hurts, the rest will feel it. KH. Hasyim Asy'ari also emphasized that division brings no benefit and only causes significant harm to humanity. Therefore, building cohesion and tolerance became the primary choice in a pluralistic society (Anandari, 2022).

Differences in various aspects, such as skin color, language, opinions, and beliefs, are a natural law (*sunnah kauniyah*) established by Allah SWT. As stated in His words in the Qur'an: "Had your Lord willed, He would have made mankind one nation. But they will continue to differ..." (Hasbi, 2011). Awareness of the unity of the group becomes a powerful force in building a harmonious life. However, the challenge of turning differences into strength still faces the reality of conflicts arising from the inability to manage differences wisely (Nirwana & Rais, 2019).

Shari'ah in Islam recommends that humans remain engaged in building fraternity and deliberation for balance based on the principle of moderation (*ummatan washathan*). Muslims are commanded to preserve diversity both among fellow Muslims and with followers of other religions (Samsu & Jamal, 2023). Religion, as a means of social dialogue, plays a role in creating harmony and peace through preventive, persuasive, and educational approaches (Saefulloh et al., 2022).

History records that the term "interfaith harmony" was first introduced by the Minister of Religious Affairs K.H. M. Dachlan during the Interfaith Dialogue in 1967. He emphasized that interfaith harmony is a prerequisite for political and economic stability (Rusydi & Zolehah, 2018). The multicultural nation of Indonesia needs the concept of harmony to avoid conflicts that could lead to national disintegration. Therefore, Islam views the maintenance of harmony as part of its teachings that must be preserved (Bakar & Hurmain, 2016).

Tolerance in Islam applies not only between human beings but also towards nature, animals, and the environment. The concept of Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all the worlds) shows that Islam prioritizes dialogue and mutual respect, not the elimination of diversity. Islam acknowledges that the diversity of humanity is the will of Allah, as His words state: "If your Lord had willed, all who are on the earth would have believed. Would you then force people to become believers?" (Witrianto, 2016).

Education plays a crucial role in building tolerance among religious communities. In Indonesia, Islamic education instills values of tolerance, both through formal schools and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). With proper understanding, students are expected to appreciate differences and apply the values of tolerance in their daily lives (Umar, 2018). Islam permits interaction with people of other faiths in the realm of *muamalah* (social dealings), although there are certain limits regarding beliefs and worship (Damanik, 2019). Therefore, building harmonious relationships with people of other faiths remains part of the principles of Islam (Anwar et al., 2021).

Religious tolerance is not only a teaching of Islam but also a humanitarian task to maintain harmonious relations. As stewards of the earth (*khalifah*), humans are responsible for filling the empty space in social interactions with humanistic values (Name et al., 2023). All recognized religions in Indonesia promote goodness in social life. This universal theological concept serves as a foundation for creating harmony and avoiding unnecessary conflicts (*Bimbingan & Islam*, 2024).

Overall, Islam emphasizes the importance of tolerance as a fundamental principle in community life. In the context of Indonesia, the role of Islam in fostering tolerance is reflected in education, the role of Islamic organizations, religious leaders, and government policies. However, challenges remain, such as radicalism, the spread of hoaxes, and a lack of understanding of diversity. Therefore, concrete efforts such as multicultural education, interfaith dialogue, the use of

positive media, and inclusive government policies are essential to strengthening tolerance in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

This research shows that Islam plays a significant role in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. The concept of tolerance in Islam is not limited to merely accepting differences, but also encompasses aspects of respect, cooperation, and social justice. The findings of this study confirm that Islamic values, including rahmah (compassion), hikmah (wisdom), and justice, serve as the foundation for harmonious relationships among religious communities.

The role of Islam in building tolerance can be seen from various aspects, such as the role of religious counselors, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, and da'i in spreading the values of tolerance within society. Religious counselors contribute through sermons and religious guidance, while PAI teachers play a strategic role in shaping tolerant attitudes among the younger generation. Furthermore, da'i contribute to raising public awareness of the importance of mutual respect and living together peacefully.

The findings of this study align with previous research that indicates Islam plays a role in fostering tolerance through education and da'wah (preaching) approaches (Melisa et al., 2024). However, this study offers a broader perspective by integrating various approaches from different actors, including religious institutions and the government, to create more effective strategies for maintaining social harmony.

Compared to earlier studies that tend to focus on local scopes of tolerance, this study highlights the importance of a more comprehensive national approach. Additionally, the study also emphasizes that although Islam teaches tolerance, there are still challenges in its implementation, such as the emergence of groups that adopt an exclusive way of practicing religion (Naim, 2020).

The findings of this study provide an important contribution to the understanding of Islam's role in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. Practically, the results of this study can serve as a reference for the government, religious institutions, and academics in formulating policies and programs to strengthen the values of tolerance in the multicultural society.

Moreover, this study asserts that inclusive education and da'wah approaches need to be continuously reinforced to prevent the emergence of religious exclusivism. The implementation of Islamic values emphasizing universal brotherhood can be a solution to addressing religious conflicts that may arise due to differences in beliefs.

Although this study offers a broad perspective, there are some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this study is based solely on literature review, and thus, it does not reflect the actual field conditions in depth. Second, this study has not analyzed the impact of government policies related to religious tolerance in Indonesia empirically. Therefore, further empirical research based on primary data is needed to strengthen these findings.

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that Islam plays a very significant role in fostering interfaith tolerance in Indonesia. Islamic values that emphasize compassion, wisdom, and justice can serve as the foundation for creating harmonious relationships in a diverse society. The roles of religious counselors, PAI teachers, and da'i are crucial in spreading the values of tolerance.

However, challenges in the implementation of tolerance still exist, particularly related to the emergence of religious exclusivism. Therefore, a more comprehensive strategy and synergy between religious institutions, the government, and society are needed to strengthen social harmony. The final conclusion of this study will be discussed further in the conclusion section.

This study also opens the door for further research on the effectiveness of government policies in developing attitudes of tolerance in society, as well as how Islam can continue to play a role in building social harmony amid the ever-developing social dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Islam emphasizes the importance of tolerance as a fundamental principle in community life. In the context of Indonesia, Islam plays a role in fostering tolerance through various instruments, including religious education, da'wah, and the involvement of Islamic organizations and the government in formulating policies related to religious moderation. The concept of Islam as rahmatan lil 'alamin (a mercy to all the worlds) emphasizes that Islam is not only aimed at strengthening the identity of Muslims, but also at creating harmony with followers of other religions.

Although various efforts have been made, challenges such as radicalism, religious exclusivism, and the spread of misleading information still hinder the realization of ideal tolerance. Therefore, more inclusive and structured strategies are needed to strengthen tolerant attitudes in society, including by strengthening the role of education, media, and government policies that support diversity and social harmony.

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