

FROM PARENTS TO CHILDREN: AN EFFORT TO INSTILL TOLERANCE IN RELIGIOUS AND BELIEF DIVERSITY A CASE STUDY OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGED 5-11 YEARS OLD

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Abstract. The Wahid Institute survey results show that the trend of intolerance in Indonesia tends to increase from 46 percent to 54 percent. This study aims to analyze and provide an overview of parents' efforts and perspectives regarding the diversity of religions in their young children today. According to the study's findings, Parents' representatives understand that education about tolerance and religious diversity needs to be given to their children who are tailored to their age. Some of the efforts that parents have made to foster a sense of tolerance of children include communication to provide understanding to children about the differences in religion embraced in their social environment and setting an example of tolerance behavior. The finding also shows that film is considered a suitable medium to be given the content of tolerance education and religious diversity and belief for children aged 5-11 years.

Keywords: Religious and belief education, Childhood education, Parents' perspectives and efforts, Intolerant behavior in religions and beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Geographically, Indonesia is an archipelagic country rich in various cultures, including various religions and beliefs. The interaction of the community around the islands of Indonesia with various foreign nations that came to the territory of Indonesia long ago until now encourages acculturation. Cultural differences and acculturation have become part of Indonesia which was then reflected in the motto of the Indonesian people, namely *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, meaning that although different, they are still one.

The study focusing on young people as perpetrators of religious intolerance has been conducted extensively (Hariningsih, 2021); (Kusuma, J.H., Susilo, 2020); (Burhanuddin, A., Yani, A.A., Hans, A., Hidayat, A.R., Pudail, 2020). Unfortunately, based on The Wahid Institute survey results show that the trend of intolerance in Indonesia tends to increase from 46 percent to 54 percent. (Metro TV, 2021). This finding is alarming from the context of religious and belief diversity in Indonesia, especially since young people tend to have intolerant and segregative attitudes (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2021). The findings of the Setara Institute suggest that approximately 20.2% of students were unable to avoid resorting to violence when faced with religious humiliation (mnctrijaya, 2023).

This is very worrying because these young people are the spearhead of the development of the nation and state. Intolerance is very close to radical actions that can cause prolonged conflict. Generally, starts from verbal attacks or physical violence so that it is possible to be used by other groups in its efforts to make the political atmosphere of a nation. According to the Professor of Political Psychology, University of Indonesia, Hamdi Muluk, politics with religious and ethnic

identities will be very deadly and most dangerous in the history of conflict in the world. (antaranews.com, 2018).

Because Indonesia requires the next generation with a healthy mental and physical condition to build this nation and country in the future, the ability to think by prioritizing analysis based on data and facts (critical thinking), and must also have integrity, social responsibility, and concern for the environment and others. Afterall, children who have character strength are a future investment (Dimerman, 2009).

These qualities also needed to avoid younger generation from easily ridden by radical groups with negative goals. One of the efforts to avoid this is through early education tolerance related to religious diversity and beliefs in Indonesia.

In simpler terms, religious and belief diversity refers to a situation where people have different religions or beliefs compared to our own. It is crucial to promote continuous education on tolerance to respect others' religions and beliefs, both through formal and non-formal means. Formal education plays a significant role as it shapes children into responsible citizens, especially in diverse and pluralistic environments. (Martínez-Ariño & Teinturier, 2019).

The same goes for informal learning. The role of parents as one of the informal educators becomes crucial. Parents, have a role in teaching children important values that are deemed necessary for their future (Septina, 2022). This research focuses on the representation of parents with children aged 5-11 because, based on studies, children under 12 have a peak phase where their memory and sharp hearing abilities can improve. (Ma'mun, 2012).

Several studies related to religious diversity education have been conducted, including the context of religious tolerance education based on the teachings of Islam through Hadiths. This research was conducted using a desk study method (Anggita & Suryadilaga, 2021); Research related to the moderation of Islam in children, focusing on parenting challenges, has been conducted using a desk study method (Astuti, A.R.T., Herman & Hadawiah, R., Ardiyanti, 2016). Therefore, in this research, the author attempts to capture the perspective of one of the informal educators, which is the mom and dad, regarding religious tolerance education. The aims of this research are to provide a qualitative overview of the perspectives and efforts of parents in instilling religious tolerance in their children.

RESEARCH METHOD

Location and Research Design. The research was conducted with informants residing in the Jabodetabek (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, Bekasi) area. The reason choosing informants from Jabodetabek area is that West Java is the province with the highest number of religious freedom violations compared to other provinces in Indonesia. Similarly, Jakarta ranks fifth according to the research conducted by the Indonesian Human Rights Monitor (*Imparsial*). The design of this research is a qualitative research technique aimed at systematically and accurately describing the facts found in the field. This study will delve into the perspectives and efforts of parents in instilling religious tolerance in their children.

Informants. The research subjects or informants were selected based on the following criteria: (1) fathers or mothers with children in Kindergarten or Elementary School Age. There are eight (8) informants in this research as the parents' representative consist of three fathers and five mothers living in Bogor, Depok, Jakarta, and Tangerang selatan. **Data Collection** The data collection conducted using two source of data, primary and secondary. Primary data taken from in-depth interviews and secondary data taken from the document reviews. **Data analysis.** The data analysis technique followed the concept proposed by Miles & Huberman, involving stages such as data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technical triangulation.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1. Religious and Belief Homogeneity in the Social Circle of Parents

Based on the social-demographic data of the informants, it is known that out of the eight respondents, there were three fathers and five mothers living in Bogor, Depok, Jakarta, and Tangerang selatan. Based on their religion, most of them are Moslem and one is Christian.

These Mom and Dad's age ranged from 36 to 45 years old. This age range can be categorized as adulthood. According to Santrock (2018), Early adulthood is a developmental period that begins in the early twenties and extends through the thirties. After that, individuals enter middle adulthood, which typically spans from the forties to around sixty years of age.

At this age, individuals are in a phase of achieving independency in personal, economic, career, and family. Therefore, it is likely that these parents interact with various individuals from diverse social, cultural, and religious backgrounds.

Referring to the interview results, most informants (80%) stated they have a social circle with diverse religious backgrounds, including colleagues, neighbors, and extended family members.

"Neighbours" (Informant A, Informant B, Informant D, Informant G)

"Co-workers" (Informant B, Informant C)

"Extended family members" (Informant F)

"None" (Informant E, Informant H)

This finding can be interpreted as an effort to demonstrate to their children that there is not just one religion and that befriending people of different religions is a normal and acceptable thing because Indonesia is a diverse country.

As for the informants who responded "none" on the question related to Homogeneity in the Social Circle of Parents, the informants actually have colleagues and a diverse religious environment but rarely interact with them. However, they allow their children to have friends of different religions in the future. This action was taken because they believe that the most important aspect of friendship is being able to influence and respect each other's rights positively.

Additionally, based on their age and development, the informants are also seen as capable of providing involvement and responsibility in helping the next generation become competent and mature individuals. (Santrock, 2018).

Generally, parents provide their children with experiences interacting with a diverse religious environment outside formal education. The age range of their children falls between 5 to 11 years old, typically considered the late preschool to elementary school period. All parents agree not to differentiate friendships based on religion, but 90% of the informants choose to enroll their children in schools with religious content (e.g., Islamic primary schools). The reason is that parents unanimously believe that the foundation of their religious beliefs should be instilled in their children from an early age. In research on school-aged children between 15 and 19 years old, (Hariningsih, 2021) concluded that students of regular schools exhibited higher levels of tolerance compared to those attending religious-based schools.

2. Parents' Perception of The Benefits of Religious and Belief Tolerance and The Consequences of Religious Intolerance

Based on the interview results, parents' opinions regarding violence caused by intolerance can be divided into three categories. Four informants stated they were aware of such incidents, while two individuals expressed doubt, and the remaining respondents answered that they did not know. The informants who claimed to be aware of the issue frequently accessed national news media.

On the other hand, the informants who expressed doubt stated that the information they received did not come from reliable sources (verified national news media), leading to uncertainty regarding the validity of the news.

Meanwhile, for the informants who answered that they did not know, it was revealed in the interviews that they had limited access to national news media. Interestingly, the understanding of parents regarding the causes of violence due to religious and belief intolerance is quite similar. They believe that the leading causes are: (1). the perpetrators' limited understanding of their religion, (2). a lack of comprehension of tolerance, and (3) inadequate education on diversity.

Similarly, when asked about the importance of teaching tolerance in dealing with religious and belief diversity to their children at their current age, the informants unanimously agreed that it is crucial.

Parents believe that from an early age, children should receive education to foster a spirit of tolerance when interacting with friends of different religions. The importance of teaching tolerance in dealing with religious and belief diversity includes: not discriminating against friends with different religions, refraining from denigrating other religions, and ensuring the safety and peacefulness of religious practices according to one's beliefs.

Moreover, tolerance is considered one of the virtues taught in the religious teachings followed by the informants, which they also use as their guiding principle.

3. Efforts Made by Parents to Introduce Religious and Belief Diversity and Foster Tolerance to their Children

During the interviews, the informants shared several efforts that they believed could introduce religious and belief diversity and enhance their children's tolerance, which were tailored to their children's current age. Here are their description in introducing religious and belief diversity and enhance their children's tolerance :

"Yes, the children have been taught about differences since they were young, starting from the age of 6. They are taught not to disparage any particular religion and to respect others when they are practicing their faith. The children have been given an understanding of the differences between various religions." (Informant A)

"Yes, I teach my children that in Indonesia, there are various religions and different places of worship. I also explain to them that everyone who practices a different religion than ours is still our brothers and sisters who deserve respect and honor. They are not allowed to mock or ridicule friends who are different in terms of ethnicity or religion." (Informant B)

"I have been teach my daughters this since they were 5 years old, but in simple terms, I tell them that friendship is about being friends with anyone." (Informant C)

"Yes, I teach them that not everyone shares the same beliefs as us, and we must respect those differences." (Informant D)

"Yes, by providing children with an understanding of the importance of tolerance and mutual understanding of differences." (Informant E)

"Yes, starting from the age of 3, when my children start to play with other kids in the neighborhood. Additionally, I also inform them that there are people who have different religions than ours." (Informant F)

"Respecting friends of different religions when they are practicing their faith." (Informant G)

"Not yet at the moment. Later, when the appropriate time comes, education will be conducted by telling stories related to everyday life." (Informant H)

From those explanation, we can conclude that those efforts include: (1) communication and (2) setting an example of tolerance behavior. Communication plays a vital role in providing understanding (Ottuh, P.O.O., Jemegbe, 2020); (Hidayah, N., Lestari, G.D., Artha, 2021). Communicating with children in daily talks instills knowledge of the diverse religious beliefs in their social surroundings. This includes introducing them to places of worship from various religions, emphasizing the importance of respecting and not disturbing friends practicing their

faith, and refraining from mocking the religion of friends who differ from their own. While setting an example and allowing socialization with others who hold different religions from them is including demonstrating and allowing children to socialize without making an issue out of the religion they believe.

Some informants (informants A, C, F) stated that they started providing understanding and examples of tolerance behavior when their children reached the early preschool age between 3 and 6 years old. As we know that age between 3 and 6 years old is a crucial period characterized by significant growth and progression in their understanding of right and wrong.

However, informant H believes her child's current age (7 years old) is considered not yet suitable for introducing religious diversity. However, suppose the child's ability and development in absorbing information are considered adequate; in that case, the introduction will be done fairly through real-life examples and storytelling methods related to the daily life aspects of religious and belief diversity.

4. Media Platforms that are Regarded as Effective Tools in Promoting Children's Awareness of Religious Tolerance and Belief

Based on the interview results, it is known that most informants stated that Movies are an effective media for providing examples of respecting religious differences among people. Cartoons like "*Ipin Upin*" and "*Nussa*" or short videos with religious and belief tolerance messages are considered influential for children in 5-11 age. In a movie, a perspective can be conveyed through the storyline featuring various themes and diverse characters portraying it.

Cremin, T., Flewitt, R., Swann, J., Faulkner, D. & Kucirkova (2017) stated that the story carries a moral lesson holds value in shaping children's character, as in general children tend to interpret the contents of the story. Based on observations research by during the learning process through YouTube media to instill character education of independence, empathy, and obedience to God in kindergarten children, it was received by them with a sense of joy and it gives big influence in learning process (Imroatun, Widat, F., Fauziddin, M., farida, S., Maryam, S., 2021).

Another media source regarded as quite effective is the book. Book is one of the media that can convey valuable moral messages through the story, pictures, and delivered in an attractive way that interests children. Stories can encourage exploration of issues that interest them, develop empathy and understanding toward others and the point of view of others, teach about their world of residence, help develop positive values, promote attitudes and qualities such as justice and also tolerance of difference (Leicester, 2006).

Game also considered as an effective media in providing examples of respecting religious differences among people. Games has been proved enhancing the learning experiences for both learners and facilitators (Prasetio, Y.L., Wijaya, R., Sjah, M.P., Christian, M.R., Chowanda, 2017); (Chowanda, A., 2019). Games can be used as one of the activities that can help children achieve complete development, whether physical, intellectual, social, moral, and emotional (Bagusa, D., Setiawana, K., Arisaputra, Harefaa, P.J., Chowanda, 2021). Game has its own appeal due to the interactive process involved in playing them.

CONCLUSION

Religious and belief intolerance can lead to prolonged social conflicts, and breaking this cycle is crucial through early education in religious and belief tolerance. All stakeholders, including formal educators, informal educators, the government, and the community, need to pay special attention to the importance of early education in religious and belief tolerance.

This paper has presented the parents' perspectives and effort to provide support to teach their children about religious and belief differences, including communication to provide understanding to children about the differences in religion embraced in their social environment and setting an example of tolerance behavior. This behavior occurs due to their familiarity and exposure to living and interacting within a varied setting. As a result, it becomes crucial to consistently offer children the introduction, comprehension, and instruction necessary to embrace diversity in religion and belief. This includes not discriminating against friends with different religions, refraining from denigrating other religions, and ensuring the safety and peacefulness of religious practices according to one's beliefs.

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