

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

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Aabstrak

Religion-based multicultural education in Indonesia is an important issue amid the rapidly growing religious and cultural diversity, especially among the millennial generation. This research aims to examine the millennial generation's understanding of religious education that integrates multicultural values, as well as explore their challenges and expectations for an inclusive religious education curriculum. A qualitative approach with case study design was used in this study, where data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and analysis of curriculum documents from various schools and universities. The results show that religious education in Indonesia tends to be sectarian and does not introduce religious diversity, even though social media plays an important role in expanding the millennial generation's knowledge of other religions. The informant expressed his hope that religious education in the future can teach the values of tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. The study also found that the lack of training for religious teachers on multicultural education is one of the main obstacles. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to integrate the concept of multicultural-based religious education with the perspective of the millennial generation, which has not been explored much in previous research. These findings provide recommendations for designing a religious education curriculum that is more responsive to the needs of the times and cultural diversity.

Keywords: religious education, multiculturalism, millennial generation, inclusivity, curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural education is a very important approach in contemporary education, especially in the midst of increasing cultural diversity. Multicultural education is not only a need to create equality in society, but also as an effort to build tolerance and mutual understanding between different groups (Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010). In the context of Indonesia, which is known as a country with more than 300 ethnic groups and various religions, multicultural education is very important to maintain social harmony. This very diverse Indonesian society demands education that not only focuses on the imparting of knowledge, but also on developing an attitude of respect for differences (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Rahman, 2016). This is increasingly relevant in the era of globalization, where different information, cultures, and views of life are increasingly accessible and affect the younger generation.

The millennial generation, who grew up with rapid technological developments, is a group that is highly exposed to various views from various parts of the world. The influence of

outside cultures through social media and the internet has had a significant impact on the way they view the world, including their understanding of religion and culture (Rahman, 2016; Suprpto, 2018). On the other hand, this generation also faces a great challenge in understanding the religious and cultural diversity around it. In this case, religious education is an important aspect that needs special attention in multicultural education (Khaldun, 2018; Mohamad, 2017). The religious thinking of the millennial generation that is open to differences must be cultivated so that they can develop mutual respect and tolerance for religious and cultural differences (Kuntowijoyo, 2015; Abidin, 2019).

Religious education in Indonesia has long been an integral part of the educational curriculum, both in schools and universities. However, religious education needs to be adapted to the times, especially in the face of increasingly complex social diversity. One of the big challenges in religious education is how to educate the younger generation to have a deep understanding of religion while still respecting and understanding the beliefs of other religions (Khaldun, 2018; Anwar, 2015). Multicultural-based religious education will encourage the millennial generation to better understand the religious and cultural values that exist around them and develop an attitude of mutual respect (Piliang, 2017; Anwar, 2015).

However, there is a significant research gap in the study of multicultural education and religious thought, especially among the millennial generation. Most of the existing research focuses more on the study of multicultural education in general without paying attention to the impact of religious thinking on the formation of multicultural attitudes in the millennial generation. Most of the literature highlights multicultural education without integrating it with religious understanding, even though inclusive religious education can play an important role in strengthening multicultural attitudes in the younger generation (Banks, 2015; Kuntowijoyo, 2015; Mohamad, 2017). This gap is becoming increasingly important to fill, given that the role of religion in shaping cultural and social identity is very strong in Indonesia, which makes research on the integration of religious and multicultural education very relevant (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Rahman, 2016).

Multicultural-based religious education is also very relevant in facing the challenges of globalization. Globalization has had a great impact, not only in economic and political aspects, but also in cultural and religious aspects. This raises new challenges in interfaith relations, both at the individual, community, and state levels. Multicultural-based religious education can help the millennial generation to better understand and appreciate the existing religious and cultural differences, so that they can coexist peacefully despite having different beliefs and backgrounds (Piliang, 2017; Banks, 2015; Anwar, 2015). In this context, religious education that can foster an inclusive, tolerant, and mutual respect attitude is needed to maintain social balance in the midst of diversity.

The importance of multicultural education in religious thought is also related to existing educational theories. Some education experts argue that multicultural education is not only concerned with teaching about cultural differences, but also with the development of attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect, and the ability to live together in differences (Nieto, 2010; Gay, 2010; Banks, 2015). Therefore, inclusive religious thinking and openness to diversity are urgently needed to form a millennial generation that not only has a strong understanding of religion, but also an attitude that is open to differences (Khaldun, 2018; Abidin, 2019). This understanding will help them to avoid exclusive attitudes that can foster social conflict.

However, the practice of religious education in Indonesia is often still colored by a more sectarian and less inclusive approach to differences. Most religious education in Indonesia still emphasizes a narrow and dogmatic understanding, which ignores the importance of tolerance for religious and cultural differences. Therefore, it is important to create a more open and inclusive model of religious education, which is able to accommodate cultural and religious differences in this pluralistic Indonesian society (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Rahman, 2016). Thus,

multicultural-based religious education can make a great contribution to creating a more harmonious and tolerant society.

Multicultural-based religious education also makes an important contribution in creating a balance between religious identity and cultural identity. Millennials, who are exposed to global information, tend to have a more critical attitude towards rigid and exclusive religious identities. They value diversity more and are more open to new ideas, including in terms of religion. Therefore, religious education must be able to respond to this need in a wise and flexible way, so as to encourage a more constructive dialogue between religious communities (Piliang, 2017; Anwar, 2015; Kuntowijoyo, 2015).

Research on multicultural education in the religious thought of the millennial generation has an important contribution in enriching the academic literature and providing new insights for the development of religious education policies in Indonesia. By examining the role of religion in multicultural education, we can create a generation that not only has a good understanding of religion, but also has an open, tolerant, and respectful attitude toward differences. Therefore, this research is very relevant in filling the gap in the existing literature and making a positive contribution to the development of religious education in Indonesia (Abidin, 2019; Rahman, 2016; Kuntowijoyo, 2015).

Research Gap: Most of the existing research discusses multicultural education as a concept separate from religious thought. This creates a gap in research that examines integratively the relationship between religious education and multicultural education, especially among the millennial generation. This research will fill this gap by exploring how religious education can strengthen multicultural values in the millennial generation, with a more inclusive and responsive approach to developing social and cultural dynamics (Nieto, 2010; Banks, 2015; Gay, 2010).

RESEARCH METHODS

This study aims to explore the relationship between multicultural education and religious thinking among millennials. To achieve this goal, this study uses a qualitative approach with an in-depth case study design, which allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The qualitative method was chosen because this approach is well suited to examine topics that involve an in-depth understanding, interpretation, and analysis of religious views and multiculturalism among millennials (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In this study, the researcher will collect data through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis related to the religious education curriculum in Indonesia (Maxwell, 2012). The subjects of this study are the millennial generation in the age range of 18-30 years, spread across several major cities in Indonesia. The criteria for selecting this subject are based on the consideration that the millennial generation in this age range is in the phase of forming a view of life, especially in the context of religious and cultural diversity (Putnam, 2000). Researchers will select informants from various religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds to get a more comprehensive view of their thinking on multicultural and religious education (Flick, 2014).

The number of informants to be taken in this study is around 20 people consisting of students, religious teachers, and education practitioners involved in religious teaching at the higher and secondary education levels. The selection of informants is carried out purposively, namely by selecting individuals who are considered to have relevant knowledge and experience regarding this research topic (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore the relationship between multicultural education and religious thinking among the millennial generation in Indonesia. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 informants consisting of students, religious teachers, and education practitioners at several universities and high schools in Indonesia, as well as observations of multicultural-based religious education practices applied in several institutions. Here are the results found in this study:

1. Understanding of Multicultural-Based Religious Education

Most of the informants stated that religious education in Indonesia needs to integrate the values of multiculturalism so that students not only understand the teachings of their own religion, but also can appreciate other religions and cultures. Most of the interviewees revealed that although they received an in-depth religious education, they were not taught to appreciate religious diversity. "We are taught about Islam, but it is rare that we are taught about other religions openly," said one of the informants (I1, 2023). This shows that there is a shortcoming in religious education that should be more inclusive of diversity (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Abidin, 2019).

2. The Influence of Social Media on Millennial Generation's Religious Thinking

Most informants feel that social media plays an important role in shaping their views on religious diversity. Through platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, they are exposed to various discussions concerning religion and multiculturalism. As another informant put it, "Social media gives us new insights into how people around the world are religious and live in diversity" (I4, 2023). However, although social media provides an opportunity to learn about differences, some informants also reveal that there is often misinformation that worsens their understanding of other religions (Banks, 2015; Kuntowijoyo, 2015).

3. Study Experience in Schools and Universities

In the schools and universities where the research was conducted, most informants stated that religious teaching was more sectarian and did not reflect multicultural values. They feel a clear separation between their religion and other religions. "I once studied in a school that was very focused on the teachings of our own religion, without any emphasis on the importance of learning about other religions," said one of the informants (I3, 2023). However, some universities are beginning to develop more inclusive curricula, which integrate the concept of multiculturalism in religious education, although its implementation is still limited.

4. Challenges in Implementing Multicultural Religious Education

Although the importance of multicultural-based religious education is recognized, there are some major challenges in its implementation. Religious teachers in schools and universities often face obstacles in teaching religious diversity due to their lack of understanding of the concept of multiculturalism or lack of training related to multicultural education. "We are not trained to teach multiculturalism in religious education. This is a big challenge because we often find it difficult to explain religious differences to students," said a religion teacher at one of the universities (I6, 2023).

5. Millennial Generation's Expectations for Religious Education in the Future

Most informants hope that religious education in the future can be more open and inclusive to religious differences. They want a curriculum that not only teaches the teachings of their respective religions, but also teaches how to respect and coexist with religious and cultural differences. "We want to be taught about our religion, but also learn to respect other religions, so that we can coexist without conflict," said another informant (I9, 2023). This expectation reflects a greater need to educate millennials to have a broader perspective on religion and cultural diversity (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010).

The results of this study show that although millennials in Indonesia recognize the importance of multicultural-based religious education, there is a significant gap between their

expectations and the reality on the ground. Religious education that is more inclusive and open to religious differences is still limited, both in the formal education curriculum and in daily practice in schools and universities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to redesign the religious education curriculum in Indonesia to better accommodate the existing religious and cultural diversity.

Discussion

The results of this study show that religion-based multicultural education still faces a number of challenges, both in terms of curriculum and understanding of students and teachers. This discussion will relate the findings in the research to the existing literature, as well as discuss the significance of the research results on the development of religious education in Indonesia.

Understanding of Multicultural-Based Religious Education

Most informants revealed that although they studied their religion deeply, their understanding of other religions was often limited. This reflects the shortcomings in the religious education curriculum in Indonesia, which tends to focus more on narrow religious teaching, without prioritizing an understanding of religious diversity (Banks, 2015; Abidin, 2019). One of the important aspects that needs to be emphasized in religious education is the development of tolerance and mutual respect for religious differences. Multicultural-based religious education should not only introduce the religious values taught, but also teach the principles of pluralism, namely the awareness that religious and cultural diversity is a social reality that must be accepted with an open attitude (Gay, 2010; Nieto, 2010). Thus, religious teaching that includes knowledge about other religions can help form a more inclusive understanding among the millennial generation.

According to Sleeter & Grant (2009), multicultural education is supposed to integrate experiences and knowledge from different cultures and religions. This will give students the opportunity to understand the broader religious context, not just within the framework of their own religion. This finding is also in line with the opinion of Rahman (2016) who stated that religious education in Indonesia must be designed to foster mutual respect between religious people, not just teach their respective religious dogmas.

The Influence of Social Media on Millennial Generation's Religious Thinking

The findings of the study show that social media plays an important role in shaping the millennial generation's view of religion and cultural diversity. Informants stated that they often get information about religious differences through social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram. Although social media provides new insights into other religions, some informants also revealed that there is a lot of information that is inaccurate or even tends to lead to negative stereotypes about other religions. This is a challenge in multicultural, religious-based education, because although social media allows for a wider dissemination of information, the impact of false or provocative information can worsen understanding of other religions (Kuntowijoyo, 2015).

This phenomenon is in line with what was expressed by Putnam (2000), who said that although millennials are more connected to the outside world through social media, they are also more vulnerable to information polarization. Most discussions about religion on social media are often extreme or biased, which can worsen interfaith relationships. In this case, multicultural-based religious education needs to provide media literacy to students to equip them with the ability to filter the information they obtain, so as to minimize the negative influence of social media on their views on other religions.

Study Experience in Schools and Universities

The results of the study also showed that most of the informants admitted that the religious education they received in schools and universities did not adequately integrate

multicultural values. Many students feel that religious teaching focuses more on their own religious teachings and introduces less religious diversity. These findings reflect that the religious education curriculum in Indonesia is still too sectarian and has not been able to face the challenges of cultural and religious diversity in society (Banks, 2015; Kuntowijoyo, 2015).

Kuntowijoyo (2015) stated that good religious education must be able to foster an inclusive attitude towards religious and cultural differences. As such, it is important for schools and universities to develop curricula that not only teach their respective religious dogmas, but also teach basic values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and coexistence in diversity. This will provide space for millennials to develop a more holistic understanding of religion and culture, as well as strengthen social cohesion in a pluralistic society.

4. Challenges in Implementing Multicultural Religious Education

Although the importance of multicultural-based religious education is recognized by most informants, the biggest challenge in its implementation is the lack of training and understanding from religious teachers. Most religious teachers in schools and universities reveal that they are not trained to teach multicultural-based religious education. This indicates that teacher training programs need to be more geared towards developing their ability to teach multicultural values in religious education (Sleeter & Grant, 2009). One of the efforts that can be made is to integrate training on diversity and multicultural education in the religious teacher education program (Rahman, 2016).

Abidin (2019) stated that in order to realize multicultural-based religious education, there needs to be a change in the paradigm of religious teaching which has so far emphasized dogmatic and exclusive understanding. Inclusive religious teaching will bring students closer to the principles of multiculturalism, which can reduce the potential for conflict and increase mutual respect between religious communities.

Millennial Generation's Expectations for Religious Education in the Future

The millennial generation wants religious education that is more open and inclusive of religious differences. They hope that religious education can teach how to coexist in diversity, as well as respect other religions and cultures. This expectation reflects the need to design a religious education curriculum that is more responsive to the challenges of globalization and religious diversity in Indonesia (Nieto, 2010; Gay, 2010). It also shows that multicultural-based religious education can serve to build a more harmonious society, where religious and cultural differences are no longer a source of conflict, but as potential wealth that must be appreciated.

Multicultural-based religious education can play a major role in developing attitudes of tolerance and mutual respect, which is essential to reduce the potential for social conflicts that can arise in an increasingly pluralistic society. This education must be able to provide space for the millennial generation to recognize and appreciate differences, not only in the context of religion, but also in the context of cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds (Sleeter & Grant, 2009; Banks, 2015).

This discussion shows that although the millennial generation has an awareness of the importance of multicultural-based religious education, religious education practices in Indonesia are still not responsive to this need. Therefore, it is important to redesign the religious education curriculum in Indonesia to better integrate the values of multiculturalism, as well as provide better training for educators to teach religious diversity in an inclusive manner. Thus, religious education can play a role in forming a millennial generation that is more open, tolerant, and ready to coexist in a pluralistic society.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that multicultural-based religious education in Indonesia still faces a number of challenges, even though the millennial generation is increasingly open to religious and cultural diversity. Although social media has broadened their views on religious

differences, religious teaching in schools and universities tends to be sectarian and not inclusive enough of multicultural values. Most informants want religious education that teaches the importance of tolerance and respect for other religions, rather than just focusing on understanding their own religion. The lack of training for religious teachers related to multicultural education is also a major obstacle in the implementation of inclusive religious education.

Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of redesigning the religious education curriculum in order to accommodate the diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia. Efforts are needed to include the values of multiculturalism in every religious education material, as well as provide adequate training to educators. Thus, religious education will not only form a deeper understanding of the teachings of each other, but also increase mutual respect, tolerance, and harmony between religions in a pluralistic Indonesian society.

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