

## **Strengthening Tolerance Character as A Form of Civic Disposition Through Community Engagement In Multicultural Societies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The character of tolerance is important to be developed in a multicultural country like Indonesia. Communities in society need to be developed massively to participate in providing understanding related to diversity, tolerance, and peace. This community can play a role in strengthening the character of tolerance as a form of citizenship for Indonesian citizens. This study aims to describe the role of the community in strengthening the character of tolerance based on a multicultural society, and analyze the implications of activities to strengthen the character of tolerance by the community in developing civic character. This research uses a case study method with a qualitative approach and with research techniques in the form of interviews, observations, and documentation. The data analysis in this study uses the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana model, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of this study show that 1) the role of the SRILI community in strengthening the character of tolerance based on a multicultural society is by holding activities such as conflict resolution training, interfaith dialogue, and overcoming prejudice. 2) Strengthening the character of tolerance can have implications for civic dispositions such as respect for diversity, being inclusive and open, respecting minority rights, commitment to Pancasila, and training critical and reflective thinking skills.

**Keywords:** *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, multiculturalism, tolerance*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is important to be used as a unifying tool for every difference in society, so that national unity and unity are created (Rahman, Najah, Furtuna, & Anti, 2020). The concept of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika creates equality for every element of Indonesian society. This concept emphasizes that diversity in Indonesia is unique, and is a way for differences to continue to grow as a characteristic of a nation. The main factor of multiculturalism in Indonesia is the georphic state of the archipelago so that a new culture or new nature arises in each region. In addition, diversity is also historically in the background as a combination of various ancient kingdoms that developed in the archipelago (Agustianty, 2021).

Multiculturalism is an approach to dealing with pluralism, which requires people in society to understand each other and relate well by not only looking at the existing similarities but also how to appreciate these differences (Walton, Harris, & Iwabuchi, 2020). Diversity, in addition to being able to cause cooperation and relationships, can also cause conflicts in human social relations (Djuniasih & Kosasih, 2019). This conflict can arise due to regional, tribal or religious feelings, which can cause selfishness over what they believe and believe.

Character needs to be developed as a personality, so that humans can adapt and interact with the community environment (Niemic, 2018). If humans are unable to show character

capacity according to certain situations, and then causing a negative impact, so it is referred to as the lack of use of character power. Virtue is not human nature, or comes from humans, but virtue arises because of a process of adaptation and interaction with the environment which then becomes a habit (Perles, 2021). There are three steps of the Aware Explore Apply (AEA) model that can increase character cultivation, namely the first phase is to foster awareness of the importance of character in a positive life. The second phase is the individual's ability to explore character, and the third phase is the ability to carry out good character. Character requires social interaction, where we relate to others (Cunha, Martins, André, Albuquerque, & Cunha, 2016).

The character of tolerance is related to the relationship of interaction between humans which can lead to cooperation characterized by the growth of attitudes and thoughts that accept differences humbly, so that this can be used in a multiculturalist society (Sodik, 2020). Tolerance can produce harmony in differences in human attitudes and thoughts which certainly do not deviate from the rules (Effendi, Alfauzan, & Nurinda, 2021). Tolerance becomes a unique type of action and practice that is an intermediary between direct rejection and wholehearted support (Chen, 2021).

Character can be taught with a character education scheme. According to (Miller, 2023) it does not only focus on moral and ethical development, but also as a tool to create a safe and positive environment. According to (Dewantara, 2004), there are three educational centers that have an important role in the development of human life, namely family, school, and society. These three education centers are in line with the opinion of Lickona who said that the success of character education depends on the community environment which is collaborated with the family and school environment to meet the needs and nature of children (Lickona, 2001).

The democratic system embraced by Indonesia is a sign of the importance of tolerance in the midst of existing diversity. In Indonesia, the civic education program continues to consider the issue of national diversity through the value of Pancasila as a national ideology. Diversity in Indonesia can cause intolerance and discrimination in society, so character education and civic education are needed as one of the steps to prevent division. In the midst of the debate about intolerance and character education, the role of the community or society as an agent of peace is very important. Communities in multicultural societies emerge as a forum for residents to be active in overcoming the issue of intolerance.

Multicultural societies need to find ways to develop equality through the active participation of individuals, finding balance by actively communicating between groups or between different individuals (Ragnarsdóttir, Jónsdóttir, Gunnarsson, & Finnbogason, 2020). According to (Habermas, 2004) religious tolerance is a peace effort that can be carried out in a multiculturalistic country, by upholding equality in life. The concept of religious tolerance as a collective recognition of religious freedom is the right of every citizen. Tolerance assumes that we can persist in a persistent mismatch in the process of social interaction, we also accept claims for those differences. Conflicts between religions can occur in Indonesia because of friction of interests that are not based on the teachings of love. This can actually be prevented by conducting dialogue. This dialogue should be understood as a forum to straighten out all prejudices, not as a forum to show the most correct religious teachings.

In order to prevent intolerance, it is necessary to build positive relationships among fellow citizens either through critical dialogue or other meetings that can lead to cooperation and deliberation (Nagda, Gurin, Sorensen, Gurin-Sands, & Osuna, 2009). The disposition of citizenship is related to the good character in the individual who can create togetherness and peace in differences (Wadu & Jaisa, 2017). Citizenship is a skill that must be possessed by individuals in interacting with other individuals. These traits include respect for human rights, honesty, courage, obedience to the law, cooperation, and tolerance.

Despite extensive research on fostering tolerance in multicultural societies, there remains a gap in understanding the specific role of community engagement in cultivating tolerance as a core civic disposition. Most studies focus on theoretical frameworks or formal education systems, leaving a lack of empirical evidence on how community-based initiatives effectively promote tolerance and inclusivity. This study bridges this gap by examining the activities and methodologies employed by community organizations, particularly in Indonesia's diverse socio-cultural landscape, to strengthen tolerance as a fundamental aspect of citizenship.

In an era marked by increasing instances of social polarization and intergroup conflicts, the cultivation of tolerance has never been more critical. Indonesia, as a multicultural nation, faces unique challenges in preserving harmony amid its diverse population. The urgency of this study lies in its potential to offer actionable insights into leveraging community efforts to combat intolerance and foster inclusive societal values, thus contributing to national unity and stability in a time of heightened social tensions.

This study provides a novel perspective by focusing on the practical implications of community-driven efforts in promoting tolerance as a civic disposition. Unlike prior research, which often emphasizes individual or institutional approaches, this research highlights the collective impact of grassroots initiatives in fostering interfaith dialogue, overcoming prejudice, and addressing conflicts in multicultural settings. It introduces innovative practices such as the application of conflict resolution training and critical dialogue sessions, contextualized within Indonesia's unique socio-political environment.

This research aims to analyze the role of community engagement in strengthening tolerance as a civic disposition in multicultural societies. Specifically, it seeks to identify the methods employed by communities to promote interfaith dialogue and reduce prejudice, and to assess the broader implications of these initiatives for enhancing civic values such as inclusivity, respect for diversity, and democratic participation.

The findings of this study are expected to provide practical guidelines for community leaders, policymakers, and educators in designing effective programs to foster tolerance and civic character. Academically, it contributes to the discourse on multiculturalism and civic education by presenting a model of community-led character building. For society, it offers a pathway to mitigate social conflicts and build cohesive, inclusive communities, promoting harmony and mutual respect in diverse environments.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study research method. Case studies are naturalistic research that investigates phenomena in real-life contexts and utilizes multi-source evidence and data collection (Flick, 2022). The design of this study uses descriptive analysis by explaining the results of field research in a descriptive manner and analyzing with relevant theories and previous research results. Then the data collection techniques used are in three ways, namely, interviews, observations and documentation. Data analysis in this study uses a model (Huberman, 2014), namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of Community in Strengthening the Character of Tolerance**

Communities involving various religious and ethnic backgrounds in a multicultural society can be a forum for dialogue between religious communities to increase understanding of differences which is an inevitability that can cause cooperation and conflict. This dialogue between religious people is a forum to clarify misunderstandings and views on certain religions. The word dialogue comes from the Greek dialogos which means through and logos

which means word. So dialogue can be interpreted as something that happens through words. Dialogue is defined as discussions, talks, conversations, and consultations between two or more individuals or groups to diversify each other and learn from each other to achieve mutual benefits. Dialogue can be interpreted as a conversation between two or more people with different views (Swidler, 1983).

Community activities such as discussions and dialogues are routinely carried out by members of the interfaith community by visiting their respective religious places of worship called by the name of prejudice. This activity aims to equalize perspectives and perceptions that religious differences should be used as a strength rather than a source of conflict, so that there is an interfaith dialogue session in it. According to (Kurucan & Erol, 2011), interfaith dialogue emphasizes communication both among people with cultural or religious differences with the aim of reducing misunderstandings and ignorance between religions. There is no agreement in dialogue, there is only a sincere exchange of views to understand each other despite differences in religion and beliefs in practice. In interfaith dialogue everyone will remain faithful to their beliefs and show respect for the rights of other individuals (Khan et al., 2020).

Critical dialogue between groups or referred to as *Inter Group Dialogue* (IGD) is an effort to form peace through a program or policy of an institution. Emergency room is a form of education about differences by using open, honest, and respectful conversations about attitudes, thoughts, and practices related to intolerance, discrimination, and oppression. Awareness of diversity will have a positive effect on the process of interaction in a plural society (Nagda et al., 2009).

This emergency room model is almost the same as the interfaith dialogue and prejudice that is carried out by the community studied. The difference is that the emergency room in its application is carried out in higher education institutions, while the use of prejudice and interfaith dialogue in the community is carried out within the community, and this activity is carried out because of differences in religion, ethnicity, and beliefs that can cause conflicts in the community.

Conflicts can occur due to injustice, inequality, selfishness, and the imposition of individual or group will. Conflicts that often occur in Indonesia are about identities such as religion or ethnicity (Muna & Lestari, 2023). Interfaith dialogue and conflict resolution can prevent violence caused by dehumanization, and discrimination (Pope, 2021). The attitude of humanizing or humanizing humans leads to relationships between humans that are based on understanding and respect for other human beings (Lando, Muthuri, & Odira, 2018).

In the conflict resolution training, seven main values were found that were upheld by participants and training facilitators in building tolerance, namely: 1) authentic and honest discussion, 2) respect for religious diversity, 3) discussion of sensitive personal experiences will not be discussed outside the forum, 4) listening respectfully without judgment, 5) collaborative discussion, 6) discussion according to the topic, 7) Time management. The learning method in this material is a case study with role-playing.

The efforts made by the SRILI community are also relevant to the *Aware Explore Apply* (AEA) model developed by Niemiec. There are three steps of this AEA model that can improve character cultivation. The first phase is to foster awareness of the importance of character in a positive life. Strengthening the character of tolerance through conflict resolution training serves to provide an understanding of the awareness and importance of the character of tolerance in the life of a multicultural society. This training begins with an understanding of conflict and diversity.

The second phase is the ability of individuals to explore characters that can be encountered in life both in the past, future, and present. In this phase, humans can evaluate characters that are already known and practiced. Activities such as conflict resolution training

in discussion sessions present cases that occur due to a lack of respect for differences, such as cases of refusal to build houses of worship or other cases related to religious conflicts. The trainees were invited to analyze the right attitude in dealing with the case. This discussion resulted in an understanding of the right attitude when there was a rejection of the construction of a house of worship which was resolved by mediation, so that participants were also trained to become a fair mediator.

The third phase is that the individual is able to carry out actions by considering the circumstances, norms, rules, and purposes of an action taken. In order to resolve a religious conflict regarding the rejection of houses of worship, of course, it is necessary to refer to the rules that apply, know where the case stands, then what if it is violated, and what if it is objected to by one of the parties. This third phase can be used as material for mediation and juxtaposed with rules or norms that apply in society.

Peace in a multicultural society can be formed by claiming democratic citizenship with aspects of human freedom and welfare. Parekh said that in a diverse life, it is necessary to develop a religious community that accepts religious diversity in a democratic environment (Azhar, 2020). Accepting does not mean opposing beliefs about truth or personal beliefs, but accepting means being able to live together with mutual respect without discrimination and selfishness. Parekh promotes interfaith dialogue as one of the efforts to prevent religious conflicts that lead to violence.

According to (Chen, 2021) tolerance is one of the right paths to use between rejection and acceptance. Tolerance does not mean accepting and believing in these differences, but accepting that these differences go hand in hand and do not interfere with each other's beliefs and views. There will be no compulsion in tolerance to perform beliefs that are not in accordance with conscience. The feeling of respecting each other, accepting the situation and views of others, and not putting each other down or discriminating against each other is what tolerance is all about.

#### 1. Manifestation of Citizenship Character through Strengthening the Character of Tolerance

The disposition of care and tolerance is in accordance with the competence of the civic disposition. Civic character can not only be strengthened through formal education in schools, but can also be formed and strengthened in the community environment, for example the community. The community is a forum for the development of competencies and skills in society. Tolerance can occur if there are differences that cannot be negotiated, or in other words, there is no or no need for tolerance if the differences are only trivial (Habermas, 2004).

This study finds the implications of strengthening the character of tolerance by the community by developing civic character in community members and trainees. Interfaith dialogue, prejudice fighting, or conflict resolution training involving interaction and communication between individuals or groups with different religious backgrounds, can be an effective method in developing civic character. The implications are as follows.

##### a. Appreciation and Awareness of Diversity

This mutual appreciation for diversity is created through activities pursued by the community such as interfaith dialogue. This activity provides an opportunity for participants to get to know and respect each other's beliefs and religions, exchange opinions in accordance with the issues discussed. Through the observations that have been made, the participants will listen and listen to the opinions of other participants without any discrimination. The attitude shown is to listen solemnly when others speak, not to cut off other people's opinions, to accept other people's opinions regardless of differences, and to discuss and dialogue together positively. This can develop civic dispositions such as tolerance that reflects the character of each individual who embraces his or her own beliefs.

Community activities such as interfaith dialogue, prejudice or conflict resolution training are held with a minimum of 5 religious diversity or invite other similar communities. This is

done to ensure that there is diversity that can producing different views. Appreciation for diversity will be felt if it is actually facing differences, so the community strives to present diversity in the form of religion to get used to attitudes and mutual respect for diversity and differences.

b. Be Open and Inclusive

Religious inclusiveism is one of the theological approaches that emphasizes the acceptance of the existence of other religions, but still maintains the main truth of the religion adopted (Jura, 2018). Religious inclusivity in context can increase tolerance, reduce conflict, and encourage interfaith collaboration. This inclusive attitude is the result of activities to strengthen tolerance in the SRILI community. This attitude assumes that individuals have a belief in a major religion, but do not view other religions as untrue or misguided, however, learn the goodness of other religions that can be used in life.

Inclusivity changes the paradigm that was originally only about oneself to also about the existence of others, and produces a moderate attitude. Moderate in religion means an attitude that does not show an extreme tendency to the right or left (Rumahuru & Talupun, 2021). In this case, inclusivity can be an important effort in the strengthening of radicalism which can cause national disintegration.

c. Respect for Minority Rights

In the context of a multicultural society, one of the tangible manifestations of citizenship is respect for minority rights. This respect not only reflects social justice, but also strengthens the foundations of democracy and national stability. The minority rights in question are equality as accepted by the majority. Communities can implement respect for minority rights by providing equal opportunities to develop and participate in various community activities.

d. Commitment to Pancasila Democracy

The concept of Pancasila democracy in multicultural life in Indonesia is contained in a frame of inseparable Pancasila values that view individual and communal rights as balanced. Communities can provide a forum for individuals and communities to uphold the principles of deliberation and consensus. This practice is reflected in the discussions produced by joint deliberation. This joint decision-making reflects the fourth precept of Pancasila, namely "Democracy led by wisdom and wisdom in deliberation/representation".

Dialogue carried out in resolving differences of views or negative prejudices with each other can be one of the commitments to Pancasila democracy. In addition, based on the list of communities and backgrounds of the conflict resolution trainees, it reflects diversity. As an interfaith community, it reflects the principle of "Indonesian Unity" by respecting the diversity of religions, cultures, and identities of its participants. They consider that diversity is used as a source of strength, not as a source of conflict. In addition, respect for diversity that produces tolerance can reflect the principle of "One Godhead" to understand each other and strengthen brotherhood.

e. Critical and Reflective Thinking Skills

Analytical and reflective discussions become a habit for the community by evaluating, identifying, and reflecting on acts or cases of intolerance and then jointly reviewing them and finding wise solutions. The ability to study issues rationally without judgment and based on logic and principles of justice can develop civic character. prejudices and views that can be erroneous and biased can be jointly discussed and resolved through dialogue.

If you look back, this community is not only focused on diversity but has also discussed related to politics. Several times they discussed general elections and provided education about the importance of voting and public speaking. Education such as discussions about biased stigma, or extremist narratives can provide understanding to the wider community. This community can be an educator, a forum for empowering women, as well as an agent of

peace, and in carrying out its duties and goals, the community accustoms members to think critically and reflectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of the community in strengthening the character of tolerance based on a multicultural society is carried out by carrying out various relevant activities such as interfaith dialogue, prejudice and conflict resolution training. This activity can strengthen the character of tolerance because it involves various religious backgrounds and various similar communities even from outside Yogyakarta to participate in the dialogue. That way, this activity can produce positive interactions and relationships between trainees and community members. The strengthening of the character of tolerance by the community has implications for realizing civic disposition. Researchers found several civic traits resulting from community activities such as awareness of diversity, being able to be open and inclusive, respecting minority rights, being committed to Pancasila democracy, and the ability to think critically and reflectively.

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