

THE STRATEGY OF INTERFAITH EDUCATION FIGURES IN MANAGING RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN BANUROJA VILLAGE, GORONTALO

**Muh. Ramoen Manahung, Najamuddin Petta Solong*, Rinaldi Datunsolang, Roy
Hasiru, Apris A. Tilome**

Department of Islamic Education, IAIN Sultan Amai Gorontalo, Gorontalo City, Gorontalo, Indonesia

**uddinpettasolong@gmail.com*

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ABSTRACT

Background: Interfaith education figures inevitably have significant role in managing religious tolerance because education is carried out both in and outside schools. Interfaith figures in society not only actualize and internalize religious values but also implement strategies for balancing the potential of nature so that the humanity of religious communities is maintained.

Aim: This paper is the result of research examining interfaith education figures' strategies in managing tolerance in Banuroja Village, Randangan District, Pohuwato Regency.

Method: The researchers applied qualitative approach with phenomenological design. The data collection techniques of this research were observation, interview, documentation, and Focus Group Discussion. Research data was tested by thorough observation and triangulation, both source and method triangulation.

Findings: The results of this research indicate three strategies of interfaith education figures in managing tolerance in Banuroja Village, Pohuwato Regency, they are: first, the assimilation strategy, carrying out a blend of cultures or assimilation of life, for example when maintaining security at the neighborhood-watch post (poskamling) by wearing traditional uniforms. Second, the mutual need strategy is embedding a culture of interethnic and religious mutual cooperation as the basic foundation for cultural resilience and the creation of distributive justice. Third, the educative communication strategy is the involvement of educators regardless of their religion in various activities and educative communication. In a pluralist and heterogeneous society like Banuroja, interfaith education figures who are full of knowledge and educational methods have a very strategic, urgent, and beneficial position for the community at large.

KEYWORDS

strategies, educators, tolerance



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INTRODUCTION

Interfaith education figures inevitably have significant role in managing religious tolerance because education is carried out both in and outside schools. Interfaith figures in society do not only actualize and internalize religious values but also implement strategies for balancing the potential of nature so that the humanity of religious communities is maintained (Tyas & Naibaho, 2020; Ulum & Tuhri, 2022).

The characterization of religious tolerance values, according to Ali (2017), is one of the tasks implemented by interfaith education figures in non-formal education, namely in the community. The plurality of religions is an undeniable reality (Wirman, 2017). This fact has

logical consequences on the attitude of tolerance that must be adequately managed, involving interfaith education figures (Amri et al., 2018).

The strategy of interfaith education figures in instilling the tolerance values in society which is actualized in daily life makes their values coexist with different beliefs (Anam et al., 2019). Therefore, the strategy can be in the form of exemplary, coaching, learning, habituation, and mentoring in the area together within the frame of religious moderation (Rosmini et al., 2022), as existed in the community of Banuroja Village, Randangan District, Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province.

Several facts found in different regions regarding various acts of violence, divisions, disputes, and bloodshed are clear evidence of conflicts in the name of religion. The importance of an accurate strategy needs to be applied by interfaith figures inspired by the divine and human values they have in managing differences through meaningful assistance because these values function as control and the basis for activities inspired by divine messages as in QS. Yunus (10): 99 which means “Had your Lord so willed, all people on earth would have certainly believed, every single one of them. Would you then force people to become believers?”

Assistance from interfaith figures in managing the potential and diversity of human beings with spiritual, religious, and humanistic values, according to Muhaimin (2000), will lead to preserving their humanity. That is, a human figure is formed as expected by religion. Since Islamic teachings emphasize understanding human existence to be in harmony with the formulation of Islamic education goals, it is relevant to the ultimate goal of Islamic education proposed by Khursyd (2001), namely the realization of development of ideology and society culture.

The strategy of interfaith figures has not been directed to develop positive potential such as *mahmudah* and to minimize the nature of *mazmumah* for its role in the human being. Thus, mental balance has been achieved and is protected from mental disorders that hinder religious tolerance. In fact, the success of this strategy can be seen from the worship and obedience of the people, also friendship and affection among people and other groups, either in the same religion or different religions.

Based on initial observation in Banuroja Village, which consists of 365 families inhabited by 12 tribes and 4 religions, it is found that the life of tolerance and harmony is quite good. This is due to the strategy of interfaith education figures in inviting the community to jointly foster attitude of tolerance in diversity through several steps that aim to minimize emergence of problems by collaborating with each other to keep village conditions in a state of harmony and peace, and also attempts are made to prevent conflict in other areas or surrounding areas from spreading to Banuroja.

The strategy of interfaith education figures has not been focused to create consistent and sustainable religious tolerance, but is only applied when disturbing conditions occur as described above, therefore the harmony between humans as individual and social beings still need to be better managed and systemic. Moreover, the implementation of the strategy of the interfaith figures has not been supported by self-adaptation which is not just a culture or habit but as a reflection of mental health indicators because self-adaptation and flexibility of association is an important part of the life of religious tolerance which should be manifested.

METHOD

The researchers applied qualitative approach with phenomenological design to explore a phenomenon in a society that has various religious choices in managing tolerance through strategies implemented by interfaith education figures. The data collection techniques of this research were observation, interview, documentation, and Focus Group Discussion. FGD was used to reveal the meaning of a group based on discussions centered on a problem related to the strategy of interfaith figures in managing tolerance in Banuroja Village, Randangan District, Gorontalo Regency. Research data was tested by thorough observation and triangulation, both source and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Banuroja village is located in the western part of Gorontalo Province, about 250 kilometers from Gorontalo City. Banuroja Village is an area that was administratively formed in 2003, the result of the division of Manunggal Karya Village. Banuroja is located between 121°788108' East Longitude and 0°588141' North Latitude, including in the administrative area of Randangan District, Pohuwato Regency, Gorontalo Province.

The residents of Banuroja Village, Randangan District, Pohuwato Regency consist of various tribes and ethnicities as well as religions, and these ethnic tribes and religions have been officially registered. The name of the village itself is BANUROJA, in which BA stands for Balinese tribe, NU stands for Nusa Tenggara, RO stands for Gorontalo, and JA is Java. Banuroja Village has an area of 6.28 Km², consisting of 4 sub-villages, with the territorial borders as follows: In the north, it is bordered by Sari Murni Village, in the east by Manunggal Karya Village, in the south by Motolohu and Patuhu Villages, in the west by the Sidorukun and Pelambane Village.

In general, the population of Banuroja has increased each year, but the increase is not significant. In 2006, the population was 865 people with 248 Heads of Multicultural Harmony Community in Banuroja Village, Gorontalo 21 Families (KK), in 2011 there were 974 people with 268 families, and in 2014 there were 1,056 people with 318 families. The data in 2022 increased to 1,174 people with 367 families. Of this number, the population of male sex is 619 people, and 555 people are females. The population and heads of families come from various ethnic groups, namely Balinese, Javanese, Sasak (West Nusa Tenggara), and the rest are from Gorontalo.

The majority of Banuroja people are from Bali, and the majority of Muslims that adhered to the outside of the Balinese people have lived their daily life patterns with tolerance, both inter-ethnic and inter-religious life. People with different ethnic and religious backgrounds feel a sense of mutual respect and equality, so conflicts between religions and ethnicities can be minimized. The people of Banuroja have reflected a harmonious and complementary life of tolerance in every deficiency and difference.

Of the total 1,117 people, there are several ethnic groups, including Batak (4 people), Betawi (3 people), Sundanese (17 people), Javanese (264 people), Balinese (474 people), Bugis (12 people), Sasak (288 people), Minahasa (15 people), Flores (4 people), Toraja (1 people), Bajau (1 people), Bali Hindu (5 people), and Gorontalo (33 people). Most of the population comes from the Balinese ethnicity, followed by the Sasak and Javanese ethnicities. Meanwhile, Gorontalo as the original ethnic group, there are only 33 people. Banuroja, a village inhabited

by thirteen tribes (Batak, Betawi, Sundanese, Javanese, Balinese, Bugis, Sasak, Minahasa, Flores, Toraja, Bajau, Balinese Hindu, and Gorontalo) and three religions namely: Islam, Christian (Protestant and Catholic), and Hinduism, is considered a miniature practice of tolerance for diversity in Indonesia. As for worship infrastructure, there is a mosque, two prayer rooms, two temples, and two churches for Protestant Christians, and Catholics worshiping in Marisa (the district capital) because there is no Catholic church available yet.

It has been recorded that during its 42 years of existence (1980-2022), there has never been a single horizontal conflict or crime between religious, customary and ethnic communities in Banuroja—as has happened in several places in Indonesia, such as Ambon, Poso, Kalimantan, and Papua. But, on the other hand, Banuroja presents a diverse and mutually reinforcing life through the diversity that exists.

One of the characteristics of Indonesian society is that there are diverse ethnic, religious, customary and regional differences (Tambunan, 2018). In Banuroja village, there are almost no commotions and conflicts among residents because the tolerance of the local community is high even though Banuroja village has different ethnic, racial, and cultural beliefs. Most of ethnic differences can lead to different understandings that may cause conflict (Taras & Ganguly, 2015).

Such harmonious conditions must be recognized in the context of a religious community. Interfaith education figures in which religious teachers from different religions namely Islam, Hinduism, and Christian in Banuroja Village take part in socio-religious roles through non-formal education in the community. The strategy of interfaith leaders in managing tolerance is adjusted to the characteristics of the population in order to assist.

Only some educators or teachers are referred to as interfaith education figures because what is meant by figures certainly has a strategic position and role in society, even though the teachers, for example, are being active in the management of religious and non-religious organizations. In addition, education figures across religious leaders in Banuroja Village have become social agents in managing tolerance through the strategies implemented.

There are 3 strategies of interfaith education figures in managing religious tolerance in Banuroja Village.

Assimilation Strategy

As mentioned earlier, according to Novita (2006) assimilation is a blend of culture or life assimilation. Assimilation activity is an association between communities, and when there are ceremonial activities they involve each other to maintain security during ritual worship (mandatory) of each religion (Zubir & Ahmad, 2022).

There is something different about the uniforms worn by members of neighborhood security posts in Banuroja Village, unlike other security posts the Linmas (Civilian Neighborhood Guards, *Perlindungan Masyarakat*) official uniform. In Banuroja Village, the complete security post crew wears typical Balinese uniforms to maintain environmental security so that people and religious communities who carry out activities including worshiping at home or in worship places feel safe. The involvement of all components of the community including interfaith figures in this activity is an excellent example of managing religious tolerance to prevent unexpected conflict. *Pecalang* comes from the word '*calang*', which means

alert. *Pecalang* is responsible to secure and bring order to the village, both in daily life and in relation to holding traditional or religious ceremonies.

It has been a long time since this assimilation strategy was initiated and carried out especially before religious holidays or worship activities of each religion's followers to take care of each other as a form of vigilance. This is because the interaction between ethnic groups, religious adherents, personally and in groups, in life need each other and requires reciprocity as a basis for friendship between others, especially religious communities.

The assimilation strategy in every activity, especially at night in Banuroja Village, which has been carried out for a long time, is not only implemented by community members and the Government but also the interfaith education figures in managing religious tolerance by involving the entire community regardless of ethnicity, race, or religion to create good and harmonious sense of family.

Balinese customs dominate this village because the majority of the transmigration people come from Bali area who mostly embrace Hinduism. It can be seen from the number of places of worship for Hindus in every house around the security post. This special strategy in managing religious tolerance is valuable from community innovation, including education figures in empowering security Posts. The more unique they are created, the more attractive the community is to support security and safety actively.

Positive interactions from the community in Banuroja Village are mainly built from a shared feeling to maintain the security of residents and religious communities. Security in an area, especially one that is multi-ethnic and religious, is carried out through interactions involving ethnically and religiously different people. This is nurtured as a form of high appreciation for the trust of each citizen as the main factor.

The absence of domination and marginalization makes every community member feel safe so that they are able to carry out their worship and beliefs properly. In addition, the complexity of the people of Banuroja Village is also added to the presence of migrants through the transmigration program. However, this is not a problem for local residents because education figures from various religions in this area work together to instill a sense of security and the importance of maintaining security for residents so that they should refrain from interfering each other.

The strategy of interfaith education figures in managing tolerance is not only involved in security post activities to maintain safety for people of other religions when carrying out worship or certain holidays, but also instilling awareness of citizens not to disturb other people who are worshipping. Therefore, not only security from guarding at the security post but the most important thing is the awareness of citizens not to disturb other religious people is a form of maintaining informal security.

Mutual Need Strategy

This strategy is demonstrated by the existence of a culture of interethnic and religious mutual cooperation as the basic foundation for cultural resilience and creating distributive justice. In Gorontalo rule, distributive justice can be called *Olohiyo Butuhiyo*. This *Olohiyo Butuhiyo* creates commutative justice in resolving socio-economic disputes. In the next level, character becomes a bridge that connects inter-ethnic and religious communication in Banuroja.

Interfaith education figures apply a strategy of mutual need in every social and religious activity by exemplifying the existence of the *Salafiyah* Islamic Boarding School whose current leader is Muhammad Zikyan Nawawi (K.H. Ghofir Nawawi's son) and the leader and caretaker of the cottage is the son of Ustad KH Ghofur Nawawi, namely K.H. Abdullah Aniq Nawawi who, in every opportunity, always takes the time to visit Hindus and Christians and generally provide assistance in the form of money to other religions.

Tracing the history of the founding of the *Salafiyah* Islamic Boarding School according to the recognition of educators that there are also founding figures from Hinduism and Christianity. When transmigration happens, a unit head (as the village head is now) look for land to build public facilities including the *Salafiyah* schools and after KH Ghofir Nawawi arrived, a boarding school was built.

The socialization of multiethnic awareness carried out by interfaith education figures in Banuroja Village by building awareness of mutual need has been carried out through the concept of social process, namely a way of relating between individuals or groups of different religions that has led to a certain form of relationship. From this relationship they get to know each other better, closer, are easier to get along with, have more trust in other parties, and finally work together and synergize because they have an embedded sense of mutual need.

The implementation of strategies to instill a sense of mutual need by interfaith education figures in managing tolerance is not only with words but provides real example, even the simple ones (Eko & Putranto, 2019), such as giving each other work regardless of their religion, shopping at kiosks or shops regardless of the owner's religious background, visiting neighbors who died without being bound by their beliefs, and doing community service in the environment because they were bound by the same desire to clean up their village even though each religion carried out the cleanliness of the house of worship.

The village head of Banuroja is a retired educator so he has more or less experience in educating and this experience is very valuable to be used to lead the village, especially in fostering cooperation to build a sense of mutual need through giving examples such as collective work, helping each other in various matters including in the religious field. Moreover, interfaith education figures in Banuroja Village have a high level of tolerance, so that their existence factor can reduce tensions that may occur. Meanwhile local and village governments are important factors in maintaining harmony at the top layer. In village institutions, there is an agreed consensus that the village head will alternate from each ethnicity and religion in each period, so that the factors of tension and political jealousy can be reduced due to the education by figures to all parties at every opportunity.

Another activity to build a sense of mutual need is to embrace and involve all religious leaders, including educators, to foster and maintain religious harmony at every opportunity to educate towards a tolerant religion (Evans & Vaandering, 2022). In addition to its own initiative, the government sometimes invites all leaders of interfaith figures to come to school through cultural education programs and religious tolerance.

Interfaith education figures in managing tolerance in Banuroja Village cannot be separated from the mutual need strategy that has been instilled for a long time in this area either through work, social activities, or other activities because otherwise it will be difficult for someone since he lives in an area that is very far from close family, left his area of origin, no longer getting attention from relatives, and even no longer helping him to fulfill daily needs. The

mutual need strategy is manifested in the work created by interfaith figures through education given to their congregations or communities who are members of an activity and work so as not to cause actions that destroys harmony among religious people because they feel they are most needed.

Educative Communication Strategy

This is another strategy carried out by interfaith education figures in managing tolerance through self-involvement in various activities along with educative communication. It is because in a pluralist and heterogeneous society like Banuroja, interfaith education figures who are full of knowledge and educational methods have very strategic, urgent, and beneficial position for the community at large.

The key to maintaining harmony in Banuroja is communication which is built on an educational and friendly basis (Brotherhood). Therefore, good relations, particularly among religious and community leaders, especially interfaith educators in Banuroja, are continuously maintained. It is a powerful way to keep communication and prevent disunity or suspicion that could lead to conflict.

Interfaith education figures have played more roles in expanding their reach, not only discussing administrative matters or teaching in schools, but also thinking more about issues related to many interests and building various collaborations, especially educative and productive communication, because after all, after graduation those students will return to the community to develop their area so that educative communication continues to be established, including solving the difficulties faced by the community, which as a result of their education.

Educative communication has been developed both in a natural way and in the form of meetings with interfaith educators through cultural carnivals, for example, the ones facilitated by the Government in order to build, maintain, and empower religious communities for harmony and prosperity. The cultural carnival in 2021 presented cultural arts from various ethnicities and religions in Banuroja Village in which the welcome speech was given by interfaith educators who enlightened the importance of cross-ethnic, and cultural communication and friendship.

The activities of interfaith education figures who are members of various religious organizations are actively involved in carrying out routine organizational tasks such as holding meeting leaders, gatherings, public discussions, conducting training and mentoring of religious communities as well as fostering religious harmony. Even personally, it is also possible to apply strategies in managing religious tolerance in *da'wah* activities in society.

Interfaith communication strategies carried out by interfaith leaders including educators are effort to formulate plans with effective message delivery by communicators to communicants with different religious backgrounds in order to unite good perceptions verbally. For example, communication between Muslims, especially Muslim educators with Christian educators, as well as Buddhists and Hindus with Chinese.

The different ethnic groups living in Banuroja village, according to the results of interviews with the village head, always establish good communication, especially with educators who have good educating abilities. According to the Head of Banuroja Village, this educative communication between ethnic groups or transmigration communities has been going on for a long time since they settled in Banuroja village because of their similar status

which is migrants. That is why educative communication exemplified by educators has built emotional bonding with neighbors of different ethnic groups.

The educative communication that has been built up among residents of various ethnicities and religions in Banuroja Village must be integrated with strategies implemented by interfaith education figures. At least it has been proved in the daily life of the Banuroja Village residents who always establish educative communication in social interactions between neighbors and always avoid negative communication to avoid conflicts.

The people of Banuroja who have different ethnicities are very tolerant and are always interactive with each other in any social, traditional, and cultural activities of each ethnicity. It is portrayed in everyday life, including when a cultural carnival is held in Banuroja Village which performed the traditions and cultures of all ethnic in Banuroja villages because it has been continuously carried out and they continue to live in peace among ethnicities and even religions.

The most prominent aspects in inter-ethnic life to build socio-cultural interactions in Banuroja are, for example, when commemorating major Islamic holidays such as Mawlid, Isra Miraj, and even the celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* (a Muslim holiday), residents of all ethnicities who live together from different religions, whether they are Hindu, Christian or have other beliefs, are always enthusiast about those event, they even provide various kinds of food to Muslims who are celebrating *Eid al-Fitr*.

On the other hand, when it comes to Christmas celebrations, Muslims and Hindus are busy handing over agricultural products such as corn, oranges, fruits and so on. Likewise, when Hindus celebrate *Nyepi* or *Galungan*, Muslims and Christians provide what the Hindus need for the *Nyepi* celebration, even the tolerance of Muslims towards Hindus during *Nyepi* celebrations can be seen from no single mosque is sounding the call to prayer at prayer times. This is a sign that Muslims in Banuroja really appreciate Hindus in carrying out *Nyepi*.

As a result of this educative communication from interfaith education figures, the people of Banuroja who are transmigration people from various regions in Indonesia, have different ethnicities and religions, but well establish religious tolerance in the form of socio-cultural interactions. Although at the beginning of their arrival some survived in the settlements of the transmigration area, but there were also those who did not survive and finally chose to return to their original areas. As for those who have survived, their lives will be in harmony, peace, and even many have succeeded. Most of them are from Bali, because Balinese people are known for their high work ethic, both men and women.

The Balinese Hindu community is not picky about jobs, both women and men, as long as it is a halal job. It should be noted that not only in transmigration areas or other areas, the work ethic of the Balinese is indeed high and they are hard worker. Even in the area of origin, Balinese people are used to challenging work. The only problem is that in the area of origin it is already difficult to find job while residential land is no longer possible to be inhabited because the population is getting bigger, so it is inevitable that other residents have to move (transmigration) to other areas, such as in the current village of Banuroja, Randangan District, Pohuwato Regency.

There is a unique tradition in the life of Banuroja people which until now has been maintained and nurtured by interfaith figures, namely, reaching out among adherents of different religions on holidays of their respective religions. For example, when Muslims

celebrate *Eid al-Fitr*, Hindus and Christians join in to celebrate it. Hindus send fruits and Christians give various kinds of food to the Muslim. They order those food and cakes from Muslims so as to avoid suspicion. It has been implemented in every Eid. If Hindus are celebrating *Nyepi*, the residents do not make a crowd. Even the call to prayer does not use loudspeakers. This cannot be separated from the educative communication carried out by educators to students or the community so that it becomes an awareness that has imbued a tolerant religious life in Banuroja Village and is spread to other areas.

When Hindus and Christians celebrate religious holidays, leaders and student representatives of Islamic boarding school visit the residents who celebrate the holidays. The purpose of the visit is solely to stay in touch with educators and Hindus and Christians. The friendship that is accompanied by educative communication between them continues to be maintained both on *Nyepi* Day and Christmas.

Some students usually visit educators and religious leaders from Hindu or Christian during *Nyepi* and Christmas celebrations. Usually, when visiting, they build not just educative communication, but every guest also brings them agricultural products, such as corn or oranges. Likewise, activities carried out by Islamic boarding schools such as recitations and lectures were also attended by residents of non-Muslim adherents. Not only during the celebration of religious holidays, Hindus and Christians also attend the Islamic boarding schools' routine agenda such as monthly grand teaching. They do not question the material in the study because they focus to discuss more on inter-community harmony and mutual tolerance. This is one of non-Muslims' habits when there are no important activities in the village.

The establishment of inter-religious harmony or the management of religious tolerance in Banuroja Village is supported by this strategy of educative communication carried out by interfaith figures. This is reflected in the concrete examples of interfaith educators with educative communication in their daily life as well as collaboration and educative communication during religious holidays celebrations. This is an affirmation that ethnic and religious differences do not disrupt the people of Banuroja, they even strengthen the friendship in every celebration due to the educative communication that educators have built.

CONCLUSION

The strategy of interfaith education figures in managing tolerance in Banuroja Village, Pohuwato Regency consists of three, namely: first, the assimilation strategy, carrying out a blend of cultures or assimilation of life, for example when maintaining security at the neighborhood-watch post by wearing traditional uniforms. Second, the mutual need strategy which is the cultivation of a culture of interethnic and religious mutual cooperation as the basic foundation for cultural resilience and creating distributive justice. Third, the educative communication strategy which is the involvement of educators regardless of their religion in various activities along with educative communication, because in a pluralist and heterogeneous society like Banuroja, interfaith education figures who are full of knowledge and educational methods have a very strategic, urgent, and beneficial position for the community at large.

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