

Religious Moderation in Inter-Ethnic Interaction of Higher Education Students in Aceh

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in Aceh has students who are diverse in race, ethnicity, culture, and language. Differences often make it difficult to interact and communicate between students, leading to misunderstandings. The research focuses on the discussion of religious moderation in interactions between ethnic students and efforts made to strengthen religious moderation in interactions between ethnicities within the scope of Aceh universities. This study used a qualitative descriptive method and purposive sampling by selecting lecturers and students at tertiary institutions in Aceh as research subjects. Data collection techniques use observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study show that student interaction between ethnicities has a positive relationship. This is evidenced by the use of Indonesian for daily interaction so as not to cause misunderstandings. Efforts to build religious moderation to interact with each other between ethnic students are a shared responsibility and duty. Efforts to strengthen religious moderation through religious approaches and humanitarian principles Concrete efforts to strengthen religious moderation through curriculum adjustments related to issues related to religious moderation and the opening of a wide discussion space for students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious moderation has recently become a hot topic and is widely discussed, both at the government level, in educational institutions, and in public spaces, as a discourse on the interpretation of new religions in the country (Sufratman, 2022). The religious moderation movement promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs found momentum because of the complexity of the problems faced by the Indonesian state. Indonesia is a country that has a very religious and plural society (Fathurrohman, 2020). Religious moderation is present as a solution to the diversity of society. Moderation comes from the word moderate, moderate, which is an adjective that means not excessive, medium, or middle. In Big Dictionary Indonesian, it is defined as the reduction of violence, avoidance, or extremes (Abror, 2020). The key to that needs to be not because extremism is contrary to religious teachings that can penetrate the practice of social Indonesian society.

Indonesia is a country that has a diverse population, ranging from religion, culture, language, skin colour, and ethnicity. The diversity of the Indonesian nation is certainly a positive (Azizah & Azhar, 2015). Space unique "homogenous society" dan "religions" at once, keep disrupts that acute because faced with storm change, good at realm science knowledge, social culture, politics, and economics that difficult unstoppable (Suftratman, 2022). Value is implemented if the people are adaptive, inclusive, and tolerant of each other. An attitude can give birth to a social force if they synergize and work together to build a homeland (Kamal & Junaidi, 2018). For the Indonesian people, diversity is believed to be a destiny given by God. Indonesia has a pluralistic society, two terms need to be understood plurality (plurality) and diversity (heterogeneity). Plurality is a contraposition of singularity that can indicate the existence of a situation consisting of cruelty rather than singularity. Abror (2020) stated that diversity is often disastrous for a nation if not wisely and wisely. Diversity that is not managed properly will cause clashes between cultures and religions that can cause divisions between the national and state (Kusumohamidjojo, 2000).

A peaceful and harmonious life is a desire for everyone regardless of background, such as social problems, social discrimination, social conflicts, oppression, persecution, and so on (Ahmad Ghazali, 2022). Indonesian is a country that has Territories that are broad from Sabang to Merauke causing interaction among different escort communities. In a multicultural society, the condition of the people in Aceh is inseparable from cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity. Aceh Province is a province located on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra and its population consists of ethnicities who interact with each other. The diversity of races, tribes, religions, and cultural Acehese society often leads to social conflicts between different groups of people. Therefore, in the life of a plural and multicultural society such as Indonesia and Aceh province in particular, the interaction between people is quite high in intensity, so every member of society needs to have social skills in interacting with each other to avoid conflict and division. This ability is in the form of the ability to work together in conflict resolution, friendliness, attention, and affection between others.

The diversity in Acehese people required them to interact with each other without discriminating. Clashes between ethnic groups are still common in horizontal communication between fellows in various parts of Indonesia, ranging from just inter-tribal prejudice to discrimination and open conflicts between tribes that can cause casualties (Akhmadi, 2019). The occurrence of inter-ethnic conflicts causes humanitarian disasters because they cause loss of life and damage to public facilities. Things like this must certainly be a common concern and awareness to respect each other between ethnicities. Inter-ethnic competition does not only occur among poorly educated people but also among intellectuals and even academics to occupy certain positions in various agencies. Today, awareness and understanding of religious and ethnic diversity are urgently needed by the people of Aceh. Diversity also needs to be managed properly to avoid the possibility of conflict at all levels of society, including students in Aceh. Events that often occur in student life, such as brawls or fights between different ethnicities, can disrupt harmony and interaction with fellows. In 2012, there was a brawl between Central Aceh students and South Aceh students, which resulted in 46 units of Central Aceh student motorcycles being burned by South Aceh students. Events like this certainly will not happen if students of different ethnicities can establish communication, build good social interaction, and eliminate their respective regional egos.

Good social interaction can occur if each student respects the other in all existing differences, including different cultural, religious, and ethnicities. An attitude of respect between students of different ethnicities, cultures, and religions can lead to solid relationships and cooperation and certainly avoid conflicts between fellow students. The next generation of the nation's future, all students who are studying at various universities in Indonesia and Aceh in particular, need to realize that the diversity of the Indonesian nation is a gift of God that must be cared for and managed properly to bring blessings to the progress of the nation and state. Ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity will be extremism and radicalism that seeks to eliminate diversity is allowed to grow in Indonesia (Karim, 2019). Religious moderation is important for students as the next generation of the nation in the future because religious

moderation will build a spirit of togetherness and cooperation in building the nation and state. The indicator of religious moderation refers to four things, namely, national commitment, tolerance, and accommodating to local culture. These four indicators can be used to determine the practice of religious moderation (Tim Constituent Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Aceh university students come from Gayo, Kluet, Aneuk Jamee, Tamiang, and Alas tribes, as well as Malay, Batak, Padang, Javanese, Sundanese, Papuan, and others. Students of the same ethnicity bond well because students of different races are different, ethnic differences might make it hard to interact. Students must be able to form positive relationships in the classroom and community. Strong friendships between pupils of one ethnicity are natural, but it would be problematic if one ethnic group felt superior to others. This can lead to individuality, antagonism towards other ethnicities, and animosity based on ethnicity and religion, which can lead to conflict amongst students of different ethnicities and religions.

Students studying at various universities in Aceh have never been involved in large-scale ethnic and religious-based conflicts, but fights and violence among students have occurred in Aceh. Such as the fight between Gayo students and South Aceh students that occurred in 2012. The trigger for the riots in 2012 was a football match at the Regional Student Sports Week (*Pekan Olahraga daerah /Popda*). This triggered initially one of the camps mocking and making fun so that his emotions provoked the opposing camp. The Sports Week, which was supposed to be a momentum to get to know and interact between districts in the Aceh region, actually caused chaos and damaged public facilities. The lack of sportsmanship upheld by both camps is so that it is easily provoked and causes riots that harm all parties.

Based on research studies on religious moderation in interactions between ethnic students at universities in Aceh, it is necessary to find out how students of different ethnicities interact in daily life, both on campus and off campus. As social creatures, they cannot let go of interaction, communication, and association between others. A common form of social process is social interaction (it can be called a social process) because social interaction is the main condition for social activities. Social interaction is dynamic social relations concerning relationships between individuals, between groups, and between individual people and human groups (Soekanto & Sulistyowati, 2013). Based on preliminary observations of the diverse ethnicity of students studying at several universities in Aceh students have difficulty interacting with students of different ethnicities because they use their respective regional languages and gather with students who have the same ethnic background. This has led to the closure of discussion rooms between ethnic students. The grouping becomes a gap in interaction. Building religious moderation that focuses on inter-ethnic students is a joint work that requires solutions and real programs or policies in several universities in Aceh. Based on an initial interview with one of the religious lecturers at the SM campus, he said that the lack of interaction between universities was due to the minimal intensity of meetings and long distances.

From the explanation of the background of the problem, the focus of the research study is 1) what are the forms of social interaction between ethnic students, and 2) What are the efforts to establish religious moderation among ethnic students at universities in Aceh?

2. METHOD

2.1 Types of Research

Research methods are scientific ways of obtaining data with specific purposes and uses. The scientific way means that research activities are based on scientific characteristics, namely rational, empirical, and systematic. Rational research activities are carried out reasonably or logically so that they are affordable by human reasoning. Empirical means that how it is carried out can be observed by the human senses so that others can observe and know the methods used. Systematizing means the process used in research using logical steps (Sugiyono, 2011). This research uses qualitative research methods, namely research methods used to examine natural object conditions, and the key instrument

is the researcher himself. According to Bungin, there are two models for analyzing data in qualitative research: descriptive analysis and verification analysis. In this study, researchers use a qualitative descriptive analysis model because the condition of the object of study is a reality that occurs in life and is described as it is (Bungin, 2017).

According to Nawawi, the descriptive method is a method which focuses on problems that exist at the time the research is conducted or problems are actual by describing the facts about the problems investigated as they are (Nawawi & Hadan, 2012). Meanwhile, the approach used is phenomenological. This approach tries to see, and understand the reality of religious moderation in interactions between ethnic students at universities in Aceh.

2.2 Location and Subject of Research

This study was conducted in the South West Aceh region, the Capital Center of Banda Aceh and the Eastern region of Aceh Province. For the South West zone of Aceh, researchers chose a state Islamic college in the Meulaboh region, namely SM. For the centre of the capital city, researchers chose a state Islamic college in the Banda Aceh region, namely UA, and for the eastern region of Aceh province, researchers chose a state Islamic institute in the Langsa region, namely IAL. The research was carried out for approximately 2 months, namely September 12 - November 10, 2022. The researchers in determining this zone are socio-cultural considerations:

- a. In the South West region, students studying at SM are very diverse with various ethnicities, cultures and languages from various regions in Aceh.
- b. In the centre of the capital city, students studying at UA Banda Aceh are also very diverse, ranging from national and even international, so various ethnic students in Aceh and outside Aceh study at this campus.
- c. In the eastern region of Aceh province, students studying at IAL are also very diverse, especially since this campus is close to the border of North Sumatra where the community is very heterogeneous.

The subject of research is an object, thing or person who is a source of data in research so that information can be obtained information needed by researchers. In this study, to determine the source of the data, researchers used *purposive sampling* and *snowball sampling*. *Purposive sampling* is a sampling technique with certain considerations carried out by researchers themselves based on previously known characteristics or population traits (Machali, 2018). The purpose of this study is to determine the pattern of student interaction between ethnicities and the efforts made by students in shaping religious moderation in universities in Aceh. Therefore, the subject is determined taking into account that the subject has information and becomes an actor directly involved in the interaction. The subjects in this study were 5 lecturers who teach religious courses and 10 students from each university in Aceh.

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

The data collection techniques used in this study are:

- a. Interviews were conducted with lecturers who teach religious courses and students at three universities in Aceh.
- b. Documentation is taken from the review of books, newspapers, and magazines related to this research.
- c. Field observations through social media are by looking at phenomena related to religious moderation among ethnic students.

2.4 Data Analysis

In scientific studies, the data processing process is called the inductive process. Data collection is carried out as much as possible related to this research, and then conclusions are drawn based on existing data. Analysis of data was carried out since the researchers conducted research. The data that has been obtained continues to be checked for validity and verified data, then data sorting is carried

out and then grouping data is according to the interests of the data itself. After the data processing process is complete, the next stage is the display of data in the form of narration (Marguerite, 2006).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Indonesian nation is already famous for its cultural diversity and its plurality. The plurality of the Indonesian nation can be seen from the diversity of cultures, religions, races, languages, tribes, traditions, and so on. So, it has the title of a multicultural nation. Multicultural society consists of countries, nations, regions, or geographical locations such as cities or villages with different cultures. Multicultural societies are not homogeneous but have heterogeneous characteristics where the pattern of social relations between individuals in society is tolerant and accepts the fact of coexisting peacefully with each other with differences that exist in each cultural entity. This is inseparable based on the foundation of Islam, namely tolerance of differences and respect for differences in thought as a form of religion that *rahmatan lil alamin*. Through this foundation, humans can appreciate, respect, and help each other the creatures created by Allah Almighty. Religions teach goodness and benefit all and everything (Zakaria, 2021).

The phenomenon of a peaceful and harmonious life does not always occur in Indonesia. Multicultural in Indonesia are not always able to live side by side as expected. Tensions and conflicts often arise in Indonesian society which has a diversity of different cultures, religions, languages, races, and traditions, at certain times multicultural becomes a big problem for harmony and even the continuity of the nation. Therefore, it needs continuous struggle to make it happen. Various tragedies of disharmony in multicultural societies that have occurred in Indonesia can occur due to the lack of multicultural awareness, low religious moderation, and lack of wisdom in managing the diversity of society, which causes horizontal friction that leads to division, all of which become bitter experiences of the Indonesian nation. To anticipate tensions and conflicts in society, it is necessary to understand religious moderation which has messages about living peacefully in differences. However, solutions with this approach are also not always successfully used without being followed appropriate and wise religious understanding because Indonesian society is a religious society.

Religious moderation should be understood as a religious attitude that balances religious attitudes between the practice of one's religion (exclusive) and respect for the religious practices of others of different beliefs (inclusive). A balance or middle ground in religious practice can certainly prevent us from excessive extremes, bigotry, and revolutionary attitudes in religious Messages (Jamaluddin, 2022). The message of religion becomes something fundamental to become the basis of society in behaviour. As a society that is fanatical about its beliefs, the religious approach is the choice to build harmony among the people. The approach chosen is certainly a peaceful religious attitude, which is to the multicultural culture of Indonesian society. With this approach, friendly, tolerant, open, and flexible religious moderation can be the answer to the concerns of conflict that are rife in multicultural societies. Religious moderation does not mean mixing up the truth and eliminating each other's identities. moderation does not dishonour the truth; we still have a clear attitude toward an issue, about the truth, about the law of a problem, but in religious moderation, we have more of an attitude of openness to accept that outside of ourselves there are compatriots who also have the same rights as us as a sovereign society within the framework of nationality. Each person has beliefs outside of faith or religion that we must respect and acknowledge. For that, we need to continue to act and practice religion moderately. Moderation in Islam has been exemplified by our predecessors, starting with our Prophet, companions, and scholars, including our scholars, to do justice to others regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, and linguistic background.

Thus, it is necessary to strive for an increase in multicultural awareness in our nation, which will further foster an attitude of religious moderation. This needs to be done for all Indonesian citizens, both by the government, national figures, and even academics in universities. Efforts to foster and form attitudes of religious moderation are developed in the community, especially among students. At least it is necessary to use a religious approach and a multicultural approach. This is because religion is a

guide for human life and a solution to solving problems or conflicts. Religious beliefs come first because religious beliefs are very dominant in a person's life. Strengthening religious moderation is a shared responsibility and is implemented in daily life to avoid conflict. Religious moderation is certainly closely related to tolerance, which teaches people to respect each other.

Based on the Indonesian context, *al-wasathiyah* entrusts a balance between religion according to the text of scriptures and its application contextually. *Wasathiyah* is a characteristic of Islam that is a fusion and statement of the concepts of *ta'adul*, *tawazun*, and *tawassuth*. *Wasathiyah* is expected to be a medium that can achieve peace and unity. Being moderate in religion and interacting with sesame can make interfaith people understand the nature of life and togetherness and consideration of context in religion (Muzakki, 2022). Departs are from the principle of maqashid or the purpose of establishing Islamic law (Shari'ah). This moderation puts forward an attitude of openness to existing differences which is believed to be *sunnatullah* and mercy for humans. Moreover, Islamic moderation is reflected in the attitude that it is not easy to blame and marginalize people or groups of different views.

The variety of differences in student groups have given nuances to the formation of behaviour which is reflected automatically both in the form of values and norms that are manifested through the implementation of student life that shapes different mindsets, actions, and interactions between their communities and their median fostering a common life in social harmony. Good social interaction between ethnic students in Aceh is an ideal that needs to be maintained and improved. This inter-ethnic student harmony is a reality that lives in the environment of every campus in Aceh, where they live in a nuance of accepting and respecting differences in plurality colours. Acceptance and mutual awareness are crucial factors in the interethnic student interactions within the realm of higher education in Aceh. Students recognise that rather than engaging in debates or asserting superiority, embracing and appreciating differences is a divine blessing. The argument regarding differences does not aim to establish superiority or inferiority between them. Rather, the recognition of differences facilitates human understanding and underscores the social nature of people, highlighting their inherent need for the presence of others.

Inter-ethnic interactions of students at universities in Aceh run well and harmoniously with various ethnically diverse ethnic communities between the majority of Acehese ethnicities and ethnic minorities or migrants. In interacting between ethnicities, students generally use Indonesian which is used as a daily language. Indonesian became the unifying language of all people in Indonesia from Sabang to Merauke. Because it becomes a vital means of communication in interacting with others. Through language students exchange each other's thoughts and experiences. If arranged and maintained properly, this good interaction condition will be a foundation and building that can create integration and consensus in creating good social relations. Good social relations between students at universities in Aceh can give birth to cooperation, both between students and lecturers. Student organizations and student activity units become a forum to develop student life skills and establish cooperation between universities.

Maintaining harmony in the university environment is important by building student personalities based on values. It can form national integration that prioritizes a multiculturalism approach so that each student can accept and recognise social diversity. This approach is intended to maintain social interaction of all diverse student groups to achieve social conflicts in the student environment. Efforts are made to build religious moderation among ethnic students in universities in Aceh through religious approaches and humanitarian principles. Through a religious approach, religious moderation is present as a solution to concerns about conflict in a multicultural society (Akhmadi, 2019). Things are evident ranging from College High in Aceh to organization extra campus grows fertile. Attempt to strengthen moderation Religious from Terms Humanity gets through Strengthening understanding Race and State and Strengthening Cultural strengthen Philosophy local. Every student of College Aceh High needs to get understanding and mentoring to understand wisdom locally because they come from a culture that has a different becomes balanced. Reason students

provided an understanding of religion and strengthened values of humanity to Implement deep life, everyday students.

Efforts to form an attitude of religious moderation in interaction between ethnic students need to involve all campus residents, especially lecturers of Islamic Religious Education lecturers. First, students are given an understanding of the methodology of Islamic teachings to know the actual limits and rules; second, through courses that are substantially directed at the formation of students with character and moderate; third, the opening of discussion space on hot issues related to moderation religious, radical, anarchist by giving true understanding if errors and deviant attitudes are found; Fifth, curriculum adjustment, sixth evaluation. Forming students' religious moderation attitudes that are no less important is the evaluation process by referring to four indicators of religious moderation, namely national commitment, tolerance, non-violence and wisdom of the local culture. This is important to do as a form of improvement if there are students who are still very extreme and immoderate. The purpose of the evaluation is to see the level of change achieved in student behaviour as material to improve student behaviour to measure the effectiveness of teaching and teaching methods that have been taught or implemented by educators.

4. CONCLUSION

Acehnese people who have ethnic, racial, religious and cultural diversity are a privilege and at the same time a concern for conflict. A multicultural life requires an understanding and awareness that respects differences and a willingness to interact with each other. The results of religious moderation research on the interaction between ethnic students at Aceh Higher Education showed a positive relationship. This is evidenced by the use of the Indonesian language in interacting with inter-ethnic students so as not to cause misunderstanding. Because language becomes a vital communication tool in interacting. Efforts to build religious moderation between universities in Aceh through academic activities, namely providing Islamic religious teaching methodology courses that form moderate students and facilitate spaces for discussions to discuss hot issues related to religious moderation. The limitations of this study include limited interviews with informants and a narrow research focus because it only discusses interactions between ethnic students in several universities in Aceh.

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