Youth Interfaith Dialogue in Everyday Citizenship in Indonesia: Bridging Religious Diversity and Citizenship Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of interfaith dialogue among Indonesian youth in fostering everyday citizenship, particularly within the context of religious diversity. The study draws on the dynamics of interfaith engagement, emphasizing its significance in promoting social cohesion, peace, and civic participation. The framework integrates the “Seven Moments of Inter-religious Dialogue” proposed by J.B. Banawiratma and Stokke’s (2017) dimensions of citizenship, including membership, legal status, rights, and participation. Examining the Abrahamic religions context, the research delves into historical challenges and the potential for dialogue to overcome intergenerational religious biases. The study highlights the necessity of understanding religious pluralism and building bridges among communities, particularly within the Muslim-Christian-Jewish framework. In the Indonesian youth context, the research identifies various interfaith dialogue initiatives undertaken by youth organizations across regions. It explores how these initiatives contribute to societal harmony, reduce radicalization, and empower civil society. The research also addresses challenges such as power dynamics and leadership influence in maintaining peace, emphasizing the grassroots’ role. Moving beyond religious discourse, the study analyzes the intersection of interfaith dialogue with everyday citizenship issues in Indonesia. It investigates how dialogue addresses challenges related to LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous religious rights, and interreligious marriage. The research argues that interfaith dialogue plays a pivotal role in acknowledging inclusive citizenship, facilitating coexistence, and addressing complex societal issues. The findings suggest that interfaith dialogue not only promotes religious understanding but also enhances civic engagement, contributing to social justice and peace. The research concludes with insights into the potential of interfaith dialogue to bridge gaps between diverse religious and non-religious perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and tolerant citizenship in Indonesia.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi peran dialog antariman di kalangan pemuda Indonesia dalam memajukan kewarganegaraan sehari-hari, terutama dalam konteks keberagaman keagamaan. Studi ini merinci dinamika keterlibatan antariman, menekankan signifikansinya dalam
INTRODUCTION

Globalization leads people to diversity, making it inevitable and increasingly connecting people, especially with different cultures and religious beliefs. Yet, exposure to diversity, such as culture, race, ethnicity, or religious belief, can have positive and negative effects (Abu-Nimer & Smith, 2016, p. 393). Even though globalization is real and affects people’s lives, some people are still exclusive; for instance, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) is an Islamic exclusive group already disbanded by the Indonesian government in 2017 (Setia & Haq, 2023). Exclusivism in religious organizations is not only in Islam but can also happen in other religious beliefs. Thus interfaith dialogue should be considered as one of the various ways to keep peace and social cohesion.

We live in a relational, dialogical, cross-cultural, and multireligious age, which makes interreligious dialogue possible (Pratt, 2021). In Indonesia, especially youth organizations, some have built interreligious dialogue to keep the coexistence side-by-side peaceful. Fatimah Husein (2019) also described interreligious dialogue among youth in Indonesia as having an important role. She also borrowed J.B. Banawiratma (2010, p. 8) notion of “Seven Moments of Inter-religious Dialogue” consisting of (1) dialogue of life, (2) social analysis and ethical reflection, (3) understanding one’s own faith, (4) inter-religious dialogue: sharing faith through experiences,
(5) theological dialogue: inter-textual reading, (6) dialogue of action, and (7) intra-religious dialogue.

The first describes the community consisting of different religious believers concerned with their daily needs, and they share joy and sorrow in the same living conditions, then bringing mutual concern. Then, in the second dialogue, those different faith communities decide on which values—peace, gender equity, human rights, and/or environmental awareness—to uphold. The third moment of dialogue describes how members of a certain community dig deeper into their own faith traditions individually. The fourth moment of dialogue describes interfaith or interreligious communities or individuals who share their faith and religious experiences. The fifth moment of dialogue is the sharing of academic knowledge and experience by theologians and other specialists. The sixth moment of dialogue involves creating a lasting interreligious concord while taking collective action to change socio-political life. The seventh phase of the dialogue is intra-religious discourse, in which community members of different faiths and backgrounds evaluate themselves in light of their own religions (Banawiratma, 2010, pp. 9–13).

From this perspective, interreligious dialogue has important roles in various aspects of human life, especially youth. Seven moments of interreligious dialogue offered by Binawiratma is not hierarchical but can be started from any moment. Yet at certain points, the author will use the term ‘interfaith’ to broaden the definition not limited to mainstream religious belief yet could be the binary stream.

In the context of citizenship, the politics of citizenship analysis framework is borrowed from Stokke (2017) to understand the dimensions of citizenship in this article. Citizenship based on Stokke (2017) is related to membership in a community as the basis of formal status as a citizen which is connected to “rights and active citizenship associated with that status.” There are four dimensions of citizenship: 1) membership, 2) legal status, 3) rights, 4) participation. Membership is based on the distinction between “insider” and “outsider” in a community. Legal status is related to individuals and states that both carry rights and responsibilities. Rights are related to membership and formal citizenship status, especially politics rights and social rights. Last, participation is important because it is the responsibility of citizens in the citizenship context.

The concept of citizenship that is offered by Stokke (2017) can be understood as ideal citizenship. Yet, in Indonesian context, these dimensions sometimes require privilege. Klinken & Berenschot (2018) argued that citizenship in Indonesia is called “postcolonial” because Indonesia has its uniqueness after the era of colonialism especially in the New Order era and cannot be compared to Global North countries. In Indonesia, informality and rights depend on personal relations. If we see in the context of capital by Bourdieu (1977), this happened in the field of politics and people gain its capital by their own personal relation as their habitus, especially with who has the power in government.

The aim of this research is to delve into the role of interfaith dialogue in the context of religious diversity among Indonesian youth, with a focus on its impact on daily citizenship. In an era of increasing globalization that connects people from diverse cultures and religious beliefs, this study seeks to understand how interfaith dialogue can be an effective means to maintain peace and social cohesion amidst this diversity.

Hence, this research holds significance as it provides insights into how interfaith dialogue can serve as an effective tool to mitigate religious tensions, reduce the potential for radicalization, and promote sustainable citizenship. By detailing the unique context of Indonesia, including the dynamics of "postcolonial” citizenship, this study aims to contribute to an understanding of how society can strike a balance between religious diversity and the principles of inclusive citizenship.
2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is designed to investigate the role of interfaith dialogue in addressing the challenges of religious diversity among Indonesian youth. Employing a qualitative approach, the study aims to delve into the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of participants in interfaith dialogue, with a specific focus on the diverse religious context (Maxwell, 2008).

The primary subjects of the research are Indonesian youth actively engaged in interfaith dialogue activities. The selection of these subjects takes into consideration the diversity of religion, culture, and social backgrounds, encompassing various perspectives that can provide comprehensive insights.

To gather data, the research will utilize several methods, including observation of youth groups organizing interfaith dialogues. Through this observation, the researcher hopes to understand the views and roles of participants in the dialogue, particularly in the context of religious diversity. Additionally, participatory observation in interfaith dialogue activities will provide direct insights into the dynamics and interactions that occur. Furthermore, document analysis related to interfaith dialogue activities, event reports, and publications of youth organizations involved will also be conducted.

The research framework will refer to the “Seven Moments of Interreligious Dialogue” proposed by J.B. Banawiratma. This framework will guide the organization of research findings to explore various aspects of interfaith dialogue. In applying the dimensions of citizenship, this research will refer to Stokke’s framework (2017), which includes membership, legal status, rights, and participation. This will provide a deeper understanding of the impact of interfaith dialogue on everyday citizenship.

Thus, it is expected that this research will make a significant contribution to understanding the role of interfaith dialogue in addressing the challenges of religious diversity in Indonesia, particularly among youth, and its impact on the dimensions of everyday citizenship.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Interfaith Dialogue in The Abrahamic Religions Context

In the context of interfaith dialogue, it is important to see it from Abrahamic religions because their roles in world history were huge. On the other hand, Abrahamic religions are the most embraced religion by people all over the world. Thus, their role cannot be ruled out because once the religious conflict happens, it will be difficult to resolve. As Coser (1956) argued that religious conflicts are considered as “non-realistic conflict” which will be difficult to resolve. For example, the research worked by Duncan (2016) found the conflict that happened in North Maluku only can reach coexistence not reconciliation. This can be seen in how people lost their trust to each other with different religions and some of them are still afraid that the next conflict can happen again. Therefore, it is not strange if after the conflict, people tend to put their children in homogenous education institutions. This condition also can happen in another part of the world, especially historically the Abrahamic religions had not good relations in the past and probably until nowadays.

See (2005) explained that “in dialogue, each partner needs to listen to the other as openly and sympathetically as possible in an attempt to precisely understand the position of the other, and as much as possible within.” Yet, according to Robert Spaeman in Scheffler (2007), since the 16th and 17th centuries, “endless interreligious dialogues” had already preceded. But, in that time, peace through inter-religious dialogue was politically irrelevant in the context of bloody wars. He also claimed that although interreligious dialogue used words, its primary goal was to demonstrate supremacy and highlight the flaws of its opponents. This can be seen in the story of Franciscus from Assisi and Sultan Malik Al-Kamil from Egypt. As explained by Moses (2009), Franciscus, for the first time, wanted to meet the Sultan to spread the truth from a Christian
perspective by having the imagination to put *taw* as a symbol of salvation through Jesus. Yet, in that time, this occasion can be categorized as peaceful dialogue. Even sometimes until nowadays, this occasion is still debatable.

Due to historical imbalances in power, the Muslim world has usually been defensive and insecure, while the West has frequently been self-centered and insensitive. This has harmed the cultural exchange between Islam and the West (Smock, 2003, p. 2). Therefore, after 9/11 happened, the dialogue between Muslims, Christians, and Jews seemed to be difficult due to fear from each other’s side. In addition, because of the Muslim immigration to Europe, their interactions have a tendency to center on their shared anxieties rather than the advantages that both parties might get from the situation. McGarvey (2019) emphasized the urgency of interfaith dialogue to solve this problem. Meanwhile, this is also complex due to the fact that historically the West was not only having issues with Muslim, but also another religion as the impact of secularism.

On the other hand, Muslim-Christian relations were bloody historically. A lot of war under the name of God and religion. Yet their relations with Jews also did not work as well with some persecution that happened, such as in the early emergence of Christianity. This history does not easily come over and be solved as a turning hand. The collective memory among each believer through stories of hatred, violence, or even victim position is already perpetuated intergenerationally.

Yet, as Aafreedi (2020) argued, peacebuilding in these religions also has problems interpreting texts, sometimes far from “exegetical pluralism.” Interpreting texts as the difficulty in interfaith dialogue also comes from the different perspectives on defining some religious doctrine or traditions. For instance, many passages in the Quran attest to the absolute oneness of God and can lead to a misunderstanding of Christianity’s concept of God, which is the Trinity (Corrigan, 2015).

On the other hand, radicalism has also become one of the problems which emerged recently. Radicalism itself can change to extremism, violent extremism, or even terrorism. This behavior can be found not only in one religion but also in all religions in certain streams. Yet after 9/11, the stigma towards Muslims is more prejudiced as a terrorist (Spalek & Lambert, 2008). Besides that, usually, the effect of colonialism and power relations during colonial times also can build hatred and prejudice in a plural society. Looking at the Muslim perspective, the narration of Western hegemony and colonialism also become one of the causes behind the hatred towards Christians and Jews. But we should look back again at how authority in certain religions exaggerates and perpetuates societal hatred and conflict.

Historical misunderstanding can also come as a challenge to pursuing a peaceful interfaith dialogue. Additionally, it is crucial to gain a theological grasp of both religious plurality and the modern setting (Hewer, 2008, p. 322). Thus, the religious authority should perpetuate the story of peace, for instance, the story of how Muhammad showed compassion in plural society or even how the Constitution Madinah made.

*Nostra Aetate, Dabru Emet,* or even “A Common Word between Us and You” are examples of how Abrahamic religions built bridges among them to build peace. Even Interreligious studies emerged to create a shared understanding among religions or faiths. Theology of interreligious dialogue is a field of study that primarily examines how religious traditions strive to assess where they stand concerning various sources of knowledge about humankind and our connection to the transcendent reality, argued by Merrigan (2017). In addition, Interfaith dialogue is not only across other religions but should include intrafaith, which can also cause conflict in society, for instance, the relation between Sunni-Shii Muslims.

Scriptural reasoning also became one of the efforts on interfaith dialogue among Abrahamic religions. This method emerged in Cambridge University, where people can safely talk and share
their faith through text. Scriptural reasoning methods can start with anybody from different religions as long as the dialogue is still among Abrahamic religions because these religions have similarities in their scripture text.

b. Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesian Youth Context

Interfaith dialogue (not only Abrahamic religions) in Indonesia refers to Rakhmawati (2010) was a new initiative policy in Indonesian diplomacy that emerged in 2002. She also mentioned that interfaith dialogue is a long-term process and usually only a normative conversation that needs to be more practical in society. As Husein (2019) found, youth organizations as practical movements already enrich the pluralism activity in interfaith dialogue. Some youth interfaith dialogue movements also can be seen in several regions. For instance, in Bandung, we can find PeaceGeneration Indonesia, YIPC Bandung, Sekolah Damai Indonesia, JAKATARUB, and Initiative of Changes (IoC) Indonesia, Mahabbah Institute for Peace and Goodness (MIPG) in Makassar or even in Yogyakarta can be seen on INTERFIDEI (Institute for Interfaith Dialogue in Indonesia) or YIP Center as the youth movements on peacekeeping and peacebuilding through dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue became urgent not only because of inevitable globalization but also because some conflicts related to diversity and security have emerged several times, for instance, the conflict in Ambon between Muslims and Christians. Regardless of the history of Muslim-Christian relations in the medieval era, Muslim-Christian history in Indonesia also came with distrust because of the colonial era, which made conflict more vulnerable. Even earlier, the Indonesian government had already taken interfaith dialogue into account in society since 1960 as the response to several conflicts that happened (Amran, 2020, p. 147).

According to Siahaya et al. (2023), interfaith dialogue in the framework of diplomacy has great relevance and a variety of key ramifications, including the following: maintaining religious harmony, diplomacy within the country, Indonesia’s role in international diplomacy, promotion of human values, economic partnership and investment, influence of international organizations, and empowering civil society. Besides that, interfaith dialogue also can reduce radicalization and violent extremist behavior.

Interfaith dialogue should be not only understood as a dialogue among representatives, but it should also give space for people at every kind of level to speak about their faith. Yet it should be in a peaceful and respectful space to make people safe to speak. Bocks in Scheffler (2007) found: “Harmony and dialogue activities work well in peaceful periods, but are insufficient in “flash-point period,” which the rapid rise of “hatred, fear, frustration, and anger” exceeds “communal good will”

Thus, power, authority, and leadership still have a big influence on peacekeeping, yet the grassroots also should perpetuate peace among them. It can be challenging, yet the awareness should still spread among lay people. On the other hand, a multireligious setting is important to understanding the interreligious dialogue, and Indonesia is one of them. In Indonesia, diversity can be faced everywhere. Therefore, all people should have good skills to live in a diverse country setting. Besides that, interreligious peace is cultivated by a culture of polite encounters, conflict resolutions, and internal control.

Interfaith dialogue in Indonesia can also build relationships because dialogue should engage the ‘whole person.’ Kang Wawan, the founder of Jaringan Kerja Umat Beragama or JAKATARUB in Bandung, as Ardiansyah (2023) shared through sinarmu.co that Kang Wawan said “dialog antar-iman dimulai dari dialog antar-teman,” which means “interfaith dialogue is started with friendship dialogue.” This view gave a good perspective that the interfaith dialogue can be peaceful as we talk with friends. In IoC Indonesia also has four golden rules when people gather to share and start interfaith dialogue. Those golden rules are: 1) no judgment; 2) no advise; 3) not comparing; and 4) confidential.
Interfaith dialogue can also change the assumptions, which are usually stigma or prejudice. According to Abu-Nimer in See (2005), a dramatic turning point in the dialogue process occurs when participants recognize, accept, and comprehend their shared fears and anxieties. People can become more sensitive to words of hatred, exclusion, and prejudice as a result of their discussion experiences. Yet it is also important to consider interfaith dialogue as a human concern, not to win the argument or attack others. Instead, in Indonesia, youth organizations made the interfaith dialogue to have the collective works. For instance, the International Day of Peace is celebrated on September 21st, usually not by one community or organization, yet it is the collaboration of various religious or non-religious movements.

Even conflict is not always the same, but in religious conflict, dialogue can be one of several ways to build peace. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is not only for religious communities but it can also for non-religious movements to understand how religions or theology frameworks can work on several issues or conflicts.

c. Interfaith Dialogue in Everyday Citizenship in Indonesia

In the globalization and postmodernization era, rethinking the political agent or subject should be important to expressing the rights and obligations in the citizenship context (Isin & S, 2002, p. 1). Citizenship studies is about developing analytical and theoretical tools to address these injustices with the depth, awareness, depth, and commitment they demand and merit (Isin & S, 2002, p. 3). On the other hand, citizenship is also related to social justice in society. This concords with interfaith dialogue, which will lead people to inclusivity and civic engagement.

In the interfaith dialogue, sometimes, it does not only talk about faith, but it could be broader than that. For instance, in YIPC Bandung and YIP Center, they usually held monthly gatherings and did scriptural reasoning. Yet, the theme is not only limited to theological frameworks but also to several issues, such as everyday citizenship. Another example can be seen from Sekolah Damai Indonesia, usually called SEKODI, which also combines the elements of interfaith dialogue and democracy, yet they emphasize democracy.

According to Hefner (2018), Indonesia has already made great progress toward the goal of creating a national culture and functioning electoral democracy, and it showed as a work in progress in the context of religions and state relations. Interfaith dialogue also can show the increase of civic engagement in society. This can be seen in how the voluntary-based community in Indonesia is increasing and shows the significance of youth participation in increasing literacy, preventing radicalism, or even peacekeeping.

Besides that, in certain communities or societies in Indonesia, interfaith dialogue also can come as a tool for conflict resolution, especially for whoever experienced conflict or violence in the past. Through interfaith dialogue, trust can be gained, and social stability can be maintained, especially in upholding the rights and responsibilities of citizens.

Yet, in the citizenship studies, several challenges can be found in interfaith dialogue. For instance, the dialogue of LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous religious rights, or even interreligious marriage can be difficult to overcome, especially if the state of the person is still not open to listening and understanding their perspective. But, there are several reasons too on how several people cannot talk about it. In the dialogue of LBGTQ+ rights, some people will disagree, and this perspective also comes from the religious perspective that binary gender in religious tradition is heresy and cursed by God.

On the other hand, indigenous religions’ rights as the local religions are also rejected by Muslims and Christians in Indonesia mostly. This can be seen in the interviews with certain authority figures in religious communities. Even if the regulation is already open to indigenous religions, the power of people, and also as the democracy paradox, the majority can silence and even affect the regulation. Indigenous religions if seen from the world religions paradigm,
it is clear that indigenous religions are infidel and can be called pagans which do not worship God.

Besides that, interreligious marriage also comes with several challenges. This is also the effect on marriage regulations in Indonesia which can be recognized as only in the same ritual, in shorts in the same religion. In addition, the authority figure also emphasized on same religious marriage and said that interreligious marriage is a sin.

Hence, the role of interfaith dialogue here is to acknowledge the people’s inclusive citizenship, and it is important. It can help people to live side-by-side in coexistence or even reconciliation, especially towards some issues that are difficult to understand. Beyond citizenship studies, interfaith dialogue also can be a good way to understand ecology, science, and technology. According to Abrahamic religions’ history, especially Muslims and Christians, reconciliation should be made through dialogue.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This research reveals that interfaith dialogue, especially in the context of religious diversity, plays a crucial role in building social cohesion, peace, and citizen participation in everyday life in Indonesia. By integrating J.B. Banawiratma’s “Seven Moments of Interreligious Dialogue” and Stokke’s (2017) dimensions of citizenship, this study provides profound insights into how interfaith dialogue can address historical challenges and promote inclusive citizenship.

Within Indonesian society, interfaith dialogue not only creates a space for youth from various religious backgrounds to understand each other but also promotes harmony among them. This not only reduces the potential for interreligious conflicts but also builds essential solidarity in achieving social unity.

Citizen participation in society has also proven to increase through interfaith dialogue. By understanding religious diversity, youth can become more actively involved in social, political, and humanitarian issues, creating a more responsive and engaged community.

Interfaith dialogue significantly contributes to addressing everyday citizenship challenges, such as LGBTQ+ rights, indigenous religious rights, and interfaith marriages. Through dialogue, youth can seek inclusive solutions to address these issues, creating a fairer and more inclusive environment.

Interfaith dialogue initiatives by youth organizations in various regions of Indonesia are recognized as empowering factors for civil society. This dialogue not only reduces radicalization but also enhances understanding of religion and strengthens the role of citizens in achieving positive societal changes.

This research highlights the importance of understanding religious pluralism and building bridges between communities, especially within the Muslim-Christian-Jewish framework. Interfaith dialogue is considered a means to deepen religious understanding and expand the inclusive scope of citizenship in Indonesia.

In conclusion, this research argues that interfaith dialogue aims not only to promote religious understanding but also to increase citizen engagement, contribute to social justice, and support peace. Interfaith dialogue in Indonesia is regarded as an effective tool for building inclusive and tolerant citizenship amid religious diversity. Therefore, the role of youth is acknowledged as key to creating a fair, peaceful, and coexistent society in Indonesia.

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