



The role of cross-cultural religious literacy training in developing teachers' tolerance values in Palu city

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Abstract

Strengthening tolerance is important in Palu's multicultural society, particularly in the educational environment. Understanding and practicing teacher education, which remains vulnerable to conflict, requires a program to prevent the development of divisive issues. This study employed a qualitative approach. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving teachers as training participants, school principals, and students at several educational institutions in Palu City. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and concluding. The research results show that the LKLB training was implemented through planning, needs analysis, participant targeting, online and hybrid training, material delivery by experts and practitioners, and participant evaluation and feedback. The training was interactive and collaborative, encouraging participants to understand and internalize the values of tolerance. This implementation is in line with the theory of social interaction and multiculturalism, which emphasizes dialogue, respect for differences, and experiential learning. The effectiveness of the training is evident in the improvement of teacher competencies in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of social skills, including understanding diversity, openness and empathy, cross-cultural communication skills, inclusive classroom management, and tolerant conflict resolution. The training also impacted learning practices through the integration of tolerance values, the application of multicultural methods, the creation of harmonious social interactions, a more tolerant school culture, and the development of openness and cooperation among students in a conducive learning environment. The practical implications of the research are that LKLB training can be used as a model for teacher professional development in improving diversity management competency in the classroom and encouraging the integration of tolerance values in planning, implementing learning, interactions in schools, forming more harmonious relationships between teachers and between teachers and students, the ability to work together in heterogeneous groups, students showing an open attitude towards diversity and creating a comfortable learning environment, and in policy as a strategic program in strengthening religious moderation in the education sector, school policy support is needed to ensure the implementation of training results runs optimally.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural, Religious literacy training, Tolerance values, Teachers attitudes

Introduction

School teachers in Palu City are the ones who instill Islamic religious values in students. Teachers, who are respected and imitated, possess ideological and dogmatic power, so learning services should possess true literacy that provides inclusive ideological capital (Mashuri, Pettalongi, Nurdin, Paozia, & Yusran, 2022) [5]. Tsanawiyah educational institutions continue to develop the mandate of Islamic education, strengthening Islamic scholarship in classical and modern literature on the one hand and adapting to cultural development on the other. Strengthening a society that provides equal opportunities for all requires individuals who are ready to coordinate their own needs with those of others, making decisions while respecting their own traditions, customs, and values. Schools play a crucial role in creating a climate where every student feels comfortable and respects differences. Teachers are also crucial liaisons in this task. If teachers are sensitive to recognizing and accepting other cultures with knowledge and respect for their own, they will transmit this to their students and make each student feel respected and acknowledged. They exist to change

students' misconceptions about social, cultural, and educational issues and to persuade them to take action in response to the intercultural challenges they experience in their lives.

Student diversity in schools is an important aspect of education. Student diversity can encompass various aspects, such as social background, culture, religion, ethnicity, language, abilities, interests, and so on. Student diversity can benefit the teaching and learning process by improving critical thinking skills, appreciating differences, collaborating with others, and enriching the learning experience. However, student diversity can also pose challenges for teachers and schools, such as adapting curriculum, methods, and learning media, resolving conflicts between students, and providing fair and inclusive education services (Arif, Nurdin, & Elya, 2023) [1]. One incident that frequently occurs in the world of education is teacher intolerance towards students with different backgrounds, religions, cultures, or views. This intolerance can negatively impact student character development and achievement, as well as lead to social conflict in the school environment. Teacher intolerance in schools is a common

problem in Indonesia (Rustina *et al.*, 2026) ^[14]. Intolerance can negatively impact the teaching and learning process, students' psychological well-being, and their academic achievement. Therefore, solutions need to be found to prevent and address teacher intolerance in schools. Based on several sources, here are some solutions that can be implemented.

The impact of teacher intolerance on students can be a decrease in motivation, creativity, or independence in learning (Rustina *et al.*, 2026) ^[14]. Students who feel unaccepted or unappreciated by their teachers will feel uncomfortable, lack confidence, or even be traumatized during the learning process. Furthermore, teacher intolerance can also lead to division, hostility, or violence between different student groups (Wescott & Roberts, 2025) ^[17]. This disrupts what should be a conducive, harmonious, and democratic learning environment. Teacher intolerance in schools is a challenge that must be addressed constructively and creatively. Teacher intolerance in schools creates obstacles to creating an inclusive and harmonious learning environment. This attitude can lead to discrimination, tension between students, and a decline in mutual respect in the classroom. Teacher intolerance not only harms individual students and groups but also undermines the overall quality of education. Addressing teacher intolerance in schools can be done in several ways. First, teachers must improve their professional and pedagogical competencies in managing student diversity. Teachers must possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to appreciate, accommodate, and facilitate the diverse needs and potential of students (Nurdin, Pettalongi, Ahsan, & Febrianti, 2023) ^[8]. Second, teachers must create an inclusive and participatory learning climate. Third, teachers must collaborate with other parties, such as parents, the community, and the government, to support student diversity. Improve teachers' understanding of students' cultural, religious, and background diversity. Teachers can participate in training or workshops that discuss diversity perspectives, human rights, and professional ethics. Teachers can also interact with teachers from different backgrounds to exchange experiences and knowledge. Encourage open dialogue and respect between teachers and students. Teachers can create a conducive and safe learning environment for students to express their opinions, feelings, and questions without fear or embarrassment. Teachers can also provide constructive feedback and appreciate students' contributions to learning. Provide an option for students of different religions not to participate in religious learning they do not adhere to. Schools can provide teachers who share the same faith as the students or provide positive alternative activities for students who do not participate in religious learning, such as reading books in the library, helping with activities in the school health center, or participating in other extracurricular activities.

This research is based on the importance of strengthening tolerance values among teachers, particularly school teachers in Palu City, one of Indonesia's most culturally and religiously diverse cities. Tolerance between religious communities and cultures is essential for maintaining peace and social harmony. As a crucial element in education, teachers play a strategic role in instilling these values in students. Therefore, efforts to

develop teacher competency through cross-cultural religious literacy training (LKLB) are highly relevant for improving the quality of inclusive and diversity-friendly education. Cross-cultural religious literacy training (LKLB) is a program aimed at increasing understanding and tolerance among people of different faiths. This program encourages participants to learn about and appreciate the diversity of religions and cultures in Indonesia, fostering mutual respect and cooperation in community life. The program also provides opportunities for participants to interact directly with religious and cultural figures and visit places of worship and different cultures. Thus, this program is expected to help participants develop inclusive, critical, and constructive religious literacy.

Literature review

Religious literacy concept

Religious literacy is a deep understanding of religious teachings, as well as the ability to interpret and apply religious values in everyday life (Fian, Rahmat, & Jenuri, 2024) ^[2]. In this concept, literacy is not only limited to the ability to read religious texts, but also includes critical and reflective skills regarding those teachings. Religious literacy aims to equip individuals with in-depth knowledge and a holistic understanding of religion, as well as to foster a sense of tolerance and mutual respect between religions. Schwartz emphasizes that religious literacy is the ability to understand religion within a broader social and cultural context, thus enabling individuals to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. This ability encompasses not only an understanding of one's own religious teachings, but also the ability to appreciate the diversity of beliefs, build constructive dialogue, and avoid exclusivist attitudes that could potentially trigger social conflict.

Religious literacy is a crucial concept in understanding and appreciating the diversity of religious beliefs and practices. This theory emphasizes the importance of knowledge and understanding of various religions, enabling individuals to interact in a more informed and sensitive manner regarding differences in belief (Juzwik, LeBlanc, Davila, Rackley, & Sarroub, 2022) ^[4]. The goal of religious literacy is to promote tolerance and respect among adherents of different faiths, as well as to prevent misunderstandings and conflicts that can arise from ignorance. Its functions include enhancing social cooperation, reducing prejudice, and building more inclusive and peaceful communities. Religious literacy is the ability to recognize and appreciate the values and principles held by other religions, even when they differ from one's own. It encompasses the recognition that all religions have positive aspects that can contribute to the common good. Thus, religious literacy serves as a tool to strengthen human relationships, deepen shared understanding, and build a foundation for productive interfaith dialogue (Ubani, 2025) ^[16]. One important aspect of religious literacy is the ability to think critically about religious teachings and practices (Mua, Sawatu, & Rado, 2024) ^[6]. Good religious literacy should involve critical thinking that enables individuals to question and evaluate religious practices and ideologies prevalent in society.

This skill can help individuals avoid dogmatic and extreme understandings and open up space for more inclusive and contextual interpretations of religious teachings. Religious literacy education plays a significant role in fostering interfaith respect, especially in an increasingly pluralistic society. Religious literacy is not only about equipping individuals with religious knowledge, but also about fostering tolerance for differences. As Eliza points out, religious literacy can reduce the potential for interfaith conflict by promoting a deeper understanding of other religions. In this way, religious literacy serves as a tool to strengthen social relations in a pluralistic society.

To achieve a better understanding of religion, one must understand and acknowledge the truths contained in various religions. Religious literacy in the context of pluralism emphasizes not only understanding each religion individually but also mutual respect between religions. This encourages more harmonious relationships amidst diversity. The greatest challenge in religious literacy is understanding religion in an ever-evolving context. In today's digital age, information about religion is widespread and sometimes unverified. Therefore, effective religious literacy must include the ability to filter information and identify credible sources. Therefore, it is hoped that religious literacy curricula will include aspects of digital literacy that will help individuals assess the quality and accuracy of the information they receive, especially on social media and other digital platforms. One important aspect of religious literacy is the ability to think critically about religious teachings and practices. Good religious literacy should involve critical thinking that enables individuals to question and evaluate religious practices and ideologies that exist in society. This skill can help individuals avoid dogmatic and extreme understandings and open up space for more inclusive and contextual interpretations of religious teachings.

The importance of religious literacy in the context of education

Religious literacy in an educational context plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' understanding and attitudes toward religion, as well as its role in social life (Huth, Brown, & Usher, 2021) ^[3]. Religious literacy is more than just the ability to read religious texts; it encompasses a broader understanding of the teachings, values, and influence of religion on human life. Good religious literacy not only introduces religious concepts but also fosters tolerance of religious differences and strengthens moral values that shape individual character in a multicultural society. Religious literacy education in schools also plays a key role in fostering this understanding. A curriculum designed to teach students about diverse religious traditions, practices, and history can help shape a more open and tolerant young generation. It also helps students prepare for life in an increasingly global and multicultural society, where they will interact with people from diverse religious backgrounds.

Academic studies have shown that religious literacy is positively correlated with socio-religious attitudes and religious tolerance. This research confirms that education and

greater awareness of religious literacy can reduce intolerance and extremism. For example, implementing religious moderation through education has proven effective in increasing tolerance and reducing religious conflict. In an increasingly interconnected world, religious literacy education is highly relevant for introducing students to religious pluralism. Often, ignorance of other religions is a source of misunderstanding and conflict. By teaching religious literacy in schools, we provide opportunities for students to understand and respect different religious beliefs. Religious literacy also helps students recognize and appreciate religious diversity as part of human cultural diversity.

Besides serving as a means of introducing other religions, religious literacy in education also serves to deepen students' understanding of their own religion. With a better understanding of religion, students can better appreciate the moral principles contained in their own religious teachings and how these values can be applied in social life. Religious literacy education provides them with guidance for living better lives and becoming individuals with integrity, capable of making positive contributions to society. Religious literacy practices can be implemented through various approaches, including formal, non-formal, and informal education. Religious education in the family, for example, should be oriented not only toward intellectual mastery of material but also toward strengthening the practice of teachings within the context of more humane and universal social interests. Indoctrinative learning methods should be avoided, and instead, a more inclusive and dialogical approach should be adopted.

Religious literacy for teachers is crucial in creating an inclusive educational environment that supports the values of tolerance. Teachers who understand various religious teachings can create classrooms that not only teach academic knowledge but also promote the values of diversity and mutual respect. Research by Abdul Ibrahim emphasizes the importance of religious literacy in education because it can guide students to recognize and appreciate other religions, thus creating a deeper understanding of pluralism. Teachers with strong religious literacy can address potential conflicts between students that may arise from differences in belief and introduce the concepts of tolerance and unity among students.

Teachers can enrich the moral and ethical dimensions of education through religious literacy. As agents of character formation, teachers with extensive knowledge of religious values can teach students to live based on universal moral principles. Teachers trained in religious literacy can instill values such as honesty, justice, and compassion, which are essential for character formation in students. This strengthens students' ability to make informed decisions in their lives, both socially and personally. Religious literacy helps teachers not only teach knowledge but also provide the moral guidance students need to face the challenges of everyday life. Religious literacy also facilitates better relationships between teachers, students, and parents. Teachers with a deep understanding of various religions can build more open communication with parents of students from different religious backgrounds. This

is crucial for creating healthy collaboration between families and schools to support the holistic development of students. Religiously literate teachers can be more sensitive to students' spiritual needs and create a learning environment that supports their emotional and moral well-being.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative methods. In qualitative research, theory serves only as a guide for data gathering and analysis (Nurdin & Pettalongi, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2016) [5, 11]. The data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis at the research site (Nurdin *et al.*, 2023; Rusli, Hasyim, & Nurdin, 2021; Rusli & Nurdin, 2022) [8, 12, 13]. The research was conducted within five senior high schools in Palu city, Indonesia. The researcher chose the schools because they are reputable government schools that implement cross-cultural literacy training in Islamic education. The results of this study can later serve as a reference and guideline for integrating local language into the teaching of the Islamic religion and for making schools a model for other educational institutions. Data were collected through direct observation, focus group discussion, in-depth interviews, and written document analysis. The interviews involved the school principal, five teachers, and ten students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were consulted with participants to obtain their consent (Nurdin, Scheepers, & Stockdale, 2022; Nurdin, Stockdale, & Scheepers, 2014) [9, 10]. The data analysis used a deductive approach, which can be interpreted as a research procedure that produces deductive data from interviews and field notes. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis from Strauss and Corbin (1998) [15]. The analysis started with open, axial, and selective coding. The final result of the data analysis is the set of themes identified.

Results and Discussion

Cross-cultural religious literacy training in developing teachers' tolerance values

This section presents research findings regarding teachers' understanding of the concept of tolerance, based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted in several schools in Palu City. The analysis focuses on how informants interpret tolerance and how this understanding is reflected in learning practices and social interactions within the school environment. Observations at Alkhairaat Buluri School indicate that teachers possess a basic understanding of tolerance as an attitude of respecting differences in students' backgrounds, both religious and cultural. In the learning process, both teachers strive to create an inclusive and non-discriminatory classroom environment. The author analyzes that this understanding demonstrates a fairly sound conceptual foundation, but it remains at a general level and has not been fully integrated systematically into the learning design. One informant stated the following:

“Tolerance is the ability to accept all students equally and provide equal learning opportunities. I emphasize the importance of student psychological comfort for an effective learning process.”

Cross-cultural religious literacy training contributed to broadening her perspective, particularly in understanding diversity as part of a pedagogical strategy, not merely a personal attitude. Tolerance is also closely related to fairness in treating students. I strive to avoid disparate treatment in assessments and classroom interactions. From classroom observations, both teachers demonstrated tolerant practices by providing equal opportunities for student participation. The interactions tended to be positive and with minimal conflict. The author believes this is an early indicator of the training's effectiveness. However, the tolerant practices demonstrated were still implicit and had not yet been fully developed into explicit diversity-based learning. Learning documentation shows that tolerance values were not fully incorporated into written plans such as lesson plans or teaching modules. However, these values were present in daily classroom interactions. This situation indicates a gap between understanding and formal implementation, requiring further reinforcement so that the training outcomes can be more systematically internalized in learning materials.

Before the training, teachers' understanding of tolerance was generally at a basic level, limited to respecting and accepting differences. Interviews revealed that teachers defined tolerance as a form of non-discrimination and fair treatment of students. However, this understanding tended to be normative and had not been directly linked to classroom learning strategies. Post-training observations indicated that tolerance practices emerged more frequently in daily social interactions, such as the absence of discrimination and harmonious relationships between students. However, the value of tolerance had not been explicitly incorporated into learning activities, resulting in spontaneous and unstructured implementation.

In terms of documentation, learning tools such as lesson plans do not fully include indicators or learning objectives related to the value of tolerance. This indicates that although teachers have a basic understanding, they are not yet able to integrate it into lesson planning systematically. After participating in cross-cultural religious literacy training, there was a significant change in teachers' understanding of the concept of tolerance. Teachers began to understand tolerance not only as an attitude of accepting differences, but also as an active ability to manage diversity through an inclusive and dialogical learning approach. Teachers began to recognize the importance of incorporating tolerance values into lesson plans. Teachers designed group discussion activities to train students to respect others' opinions. This indicates an improvement in lesson planning. Post-training observations also showed changes in learning practices, where teachers were more active in encouraging interactions that respect differences. Learning activities became more participatory, and students were given space to express their opinions openly.

Furthermore, the lesson plan documents prepared after the training clearly included tolerance indicators in the objectives, activities, and assessments. This indicates the systematic integration of tolerance values into the learning materials. This change in understanding is also evident in the way teachers view diversity. While previously considered merely a condition

to be accepted, after the training, diversity is viewed as a learning resource that can be utilized to enrich students' experiences. Cross-cultural religious literacy training is effective in enhancing teachers' understanding of tolerance, both conceptually and practically. This change is evident in the shift from a normative understanding to a more reflective, applicable, and integrated understanding of the learning process.

Research was also conducted at the school through classroom observations, which showed that the learning process took place in a fairly inclusive atmosphere. All students were given equal opportunities to participate in learning activities, particularly during discussions and Q&A sessions. Interactions between students also occurred harmoniously, without any particular group dominating. The practices of one teacher reflected an understanding of tolerance that was beginning to be implemented pedagogically. Cross-cultural religious literacy training appeared to encourage teachers to create more participatory learning and respect student differences. One informant stated the following:

“Before participating in the training, I understood tolerance as an attitude of mutual respect and non-discrimination among students. I usually emphasized this through advice and simple examples in class. After participating in the training, I have a better understanding that tolerance needs to be taught in a planned manner. Now I try to incorporate the value of tolerance into my lesson plans, for example through storytelling activities or simple discussions that teach students mutual respect. I have also begun assessing students' attitudes toward respecting their peers, so that academic grades are not the only consideration.”

Researchers also observed the activities of teachers at the school, showing that they actively managed classroom dynamics with an approach that emphasized togetherness and cooperation among students. When minor conflicts arose, they preferred a simple dialogue and deliberation approach in the classroom. A teacher's approach demonstrated active tolerance practices in the form of conflict management. This indicates that cross-cultural religious literacy training has impacted teachers' ability to build a harmonious classroom environment that is responsive to differences. Based on the results of the learning tool documentation, a teacher has incorporated the value of tolerance into the lesson plan, particularly in the learning objectives and core activities. This value is formulated as an attitude of respecting peers' opinions and working together in groups.

Researchers found that integrating tolerance values into lesson plans demonstrated significant changes in learning planning. This indicates that cross-cultural religious literacy training not only influenced teachers' understanding but also impacted administrative aspects and lesson planning. One teacher's documentation also showed that tolerance values had been incorporated into lesson plans as part of strengthening student character. Learning activities were designed to encourage cooperation and mutual respect among students in study groups. The presence of tolerance values in learning documents

indicates a more systematic internalization of these values. Therefore, LKLB training can be said to be effective in encouraging teachers to integrate diversity values into formal learning materials.

Understanding religious and cultural diversity

Understanding religious and cultural diversity is a key aspect in fostering tolerance in educational settings, particularly in multicultural areas like Palu City. Research findings obtained through observation, documentation, and interviews with participants in cross-cultural religious literacy training revealed that the training significantly broadened teachers' understanding of socio-religious plurality. Post-training observations indicated that participants demonstrated increased openness to accepting differences. Group discussions involving real-life case studies encouraged teachers to understand diverse religious and cultural perspectives based on their personal experiences. This is an early indicator that the training fostered critical awareness of diversity. One teacher stated:

“Before participating in the training, my understanding of religious diversity was limited to normative aspects. After participating, I began to realize the importance of understanding other religious practices contextually and not simply based on assumptions. This training helped me develop a more inclusive teaching approach. I began integrating values of tolerance into my daily interactions with students, even though the subjects I taught were not religiously based.”

This training provided a new perspective on understanding religious teachings more moderately. I admit that the previous approach tended to be exclusive, but the training encouraged me to see the importance of interfaith dialogue. In teaching practice, teachers began using more participatory learning methods, such as discussions and role-playing, to introduce the concept of tolerance to students from an early age. This demonstrates that the training impacted not only knowledge but also pedagogical strategies. Teachers also highlighted the importance of introducing diversity from an early age. Data from the training documentation shows that the training materials covered topics such as pluralism, religious moderation, and cross-cultural communication. This material was systematically structured and accompanied by concrete examples that were easy for participants to understand. Other documents also show increased active participation by participants in each training session. This indicates that the training methods used were able to attract participant interest and engagement optimally. Another finding of this study is that the cross-cultural religious literacy training fostered a reflective attitude in teachers. Participants began to reevaluate their views and practices in interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusion

The Cross-Cultural Religious Literacy training program is a strategic initiative comprehensively designed through a collaboration between the Leimena Institute and Alkhairaat

University to address the real need to strengthen religious tolerance and moderation in a multicultural educational environment. The training began with a needs analysis that revealed teachers' limited understanding and skills in managing diversity, so activities focused not only on cognitive aspects but also on developing applicable attitudes and practical skills. The heterogeneous target audience and the use of online and hybrid learning methods have proven effective in creating flexible, interactive, and contextual learning experiences, supported by comprehensive materials and competent speakers from local to international levels using a participatory and reflective andragogical approach. The training results showed a significant increase in teachers' understanding, awareness, and pedagogical skills, marked by a paradigm shift from a normative learning approach to a more inclusive, dialogical, and humanitarian-based approach, as well as participants' readiness to implement the values of tolerance, religious freedom, and the rule of law in learning practices.

Cross-cultural religious literacy training has proven effective in developing teachers' tolerance values in Palu City, as demonstrated by significant improvements in participants' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor-social skills after the training. Teachers experienced an expanded understanding of religious and cultural diversity, shifting from a normative perspective to a more contextual and inclusive one. Furthermore, attitudes changed, characterized by increased openness, appreciation for differences, and social and religious empathy. In terms of skills, teachers demonstrated improved cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution in a tolerant, dialogical, and constructive manner. Participants' perceptions of the training were also very positive, assessing it as relevant, beneficial, and providing a profoundly reflective experience. The level of active participation during the training further strengthens the program's success. Thus, cross-cultural religious literacy training can be considered an effective intervention in building and strengthening teachers' tolerance values.

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