



Educational Strategies for Mitigating Religion-Based Conflict Potential in Indonesia: A Qualitative Multiple-Case Study Across Urban and Rural Communities

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Abstract

Religion-based conflicts remain a significant challenge to maintaining social cohesion in Indonesia, a nation historically recognized for its rich religious and cultural diversity. Religious sentiments expressed in both face-to-face interactions and digital spaces frequently contribute to social tensions, particularly in communities with high levels of social vulnerability. From an educational perspective, strengthening peace education, interfaith dialogue, and multicultural learning is essential for preventing the escalation of religious tensions and fostering sustainable social harmony. This study aims to examine educationally informed strategies for mitigating religion-based conflicts in selected urban and rural areas characterized by latent conflict potential. A qualitative multiple-case study design was employed across five strategic regions: Jakarta, Surakarta, Ambon, Poso, and Tasikmalaya. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with religious leaders, community leaders, and education stakeholders, complemented by participant observation and analysis of local policy documents. The findings reveal that effective conflict mitigation is strongly influenced by three interconnected factors: the strength of interfaith social networks, the mediation capacity of local actors, and adaptive public policies responsive to local socio-cultural dynamics. In urban settings, the active role of Interfaith Harmony Forums (FKUB), educational institutions, and digital campaigns promoting religious moderation significantly contributed to preventing conflict escalation. In rural communities, educational initiatives grounded in local wisdom, community reconciliation, and culturally responsive learning proved more effective in strengthening mutual understanding and social resilience. The study recommends enhancing the capacity of educators, religious leaders, and community facilitators while integrating structural and cultural approaches into educational policies and conflict mitigation frameworks. These findings highlight the strategic role of education as a transformative instrument for promoting religious tolerance, social cohesion, and sustainable peace in multicultural societies.

Keywords: peace education; religious moderation; religion-based conflict; social cohesion; multicultural education; qualitative multiple-case study; Indonesia.

Abstrak

Konflik berbasis sentimen agama masih menjadi tantangan yang signifikan dalam menjaga kohesi sosial di Indonesia, sebuah negara yang secara historis dikenal memiliki keberagaman agama dan budaya yang kaya. Sentimen keagamaan yang diekspresikan baik melalui interaksi tatap muka maupun ruang digital sering kali memicu ketegangan sosial, khususnya pada masyarakat yang memiliki tingkat kerentanan sosial yang tinggi. Dari perspektif pendidikan, penguatan pendidikan perdamaian, dialog lintas agama, dan pembelajaran multikultural menjadi langkah penting untuk mencegah eskalasi ketegangan keagamaan sekaligus membangun harmoni sosial yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji strategi mitigasi konflik berbasis sentimen agama melalui pendekatan pendidikan di sejumlah wilayah urban dan rural yang memiliki potensi konflik laten. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus multi-lokasi yang dilaksanakan di lima wilayah strategis, yaitu Jakarta, Surakarta, Ambon, Poso, dan Tasikmalaya. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan tokoh agama, tokoh masyarakat, dan pemangku kepentingan di bidang pendidikan, yang dilengkapi dengan observasi partisipatif serta analisis dokumen kebijakan daerah. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa efektivitas mitigasi konflik sangat dipengaruhi oleh tiga faktor utama yang saling berkaitan, yaitu kekuatan

jejaring sosial lintas agama, kapasitas mediasi aktor lokal, serta kebijakan publik yang adaptif terhadap dinamika sosial dan budaya setempat. Di wilayah urban, peran aktif Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), lembaga pendidikan, serta kampanye digital mengenai moderasi beragama memberikan kontribusi yang signifikan dalam mencegah eskalasi konflik. Sementara itu, di wilayah rural, inisiatif pendidikan yang berlandaskan kearifan lokal, rekonsiliasi komunitas, dan pembelajaran yang responsif terhadap budaya lokal terbukti lebih efektif dalam memperkuat saling pengertian dan ketahanan sosial masyarakat. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan peningkatan kapasitas pendidik, tokoh agama, dan fasilitator masyarakat, serta integrasi pendekatan struktural dan kultural ke dalam kebijakan pendidikan dan kerangka mitigasi konflik berbasis agama. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendidikan memiliki peran strategis sebagai instrumen transformatif dalam mempromosikan toleransi beragama, memperkuat kohesi sosial, dan mewujudkan perdamaian yang berkelanjutan di masyarakat multikultural.

Kata Kunci: pendidikan perdamaian; moderasi beragama; konflik berbasis agama; kohesi sosial; pendidikan multikultural; studi kasus kualitatif multi-lokasi; Indonesia.

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the world's most religiously and culturally diverse nations, where tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect have long served as the foundation of national unity. Despite this rich pluralistic heritage, the country has experienced a growing potential for religion-based conflicts over the past several decades. These conflicts have emerged in both tangible and symbolic forms, driven by differing religious interpretations, identity politics, and the rapid dissemination of hate speech and misinformation through digital platforms. Such developments have exposed the fragility of social cohesion within Indonesia's multicultural society, particularly in highly dynamic urban settings and culturally distinctive rural communities. Consequently, religious sentiment has evolved beyond interpersonal disagreement into a significant socio-political determinant capable of influencing community stability and national integration (Rissanen, 2018).

Numerous cases across Indonesia demonstrate how religious issues have been mobilized to strengthen political identities, intensify social polarization, and provoke prolonged communal conflicts. These circumstances highlight the urgent need for conflict mitigation strategies that move beyond reactive interventions toward preventive, context-sensitive, and educationally oriented approaches capable of addressing the underlying social and cultural

roots of conflict. Within this context, education plays a strategic role not only in transmitting knowledge but also in cultivating democratic values, intercultural competence, religious moderation, and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.

Educational institutions, community learning centers, religious organizations, and informal educational networks have increasingly been recognized as essential actors in promoting peacebuilding and preventing the escalation of religion-based conflicts. Peace education, multicultural education, interfaith dialogue, and citizenship education provide individuals with opportunities to develop empathy, critical thinking, conflict resolution skills, and respect for diversity. These educational approaches contribute to strengthening social resilience and fostering inclusive communities capable of managing religious differences constructively rather than confrontationally (Ananda & Mishra, 2025).

Previous studies have predominantly examined religion-based conflicts from macro-level political perspectives or focused on post-conflict reconstruction following major episodes of communal violence. Comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding educational strategies for mitigating everyday religious tensions experienced by urban and rural communities facing persistent social polarization (Ellison et al., 2013). Consequently, a deeper understanding is needed regarding how local communities develop educational, institutional, cultural,

and social mechanisms that prevent latent conflicts from escalating into destructive violence.

This study aims to identify and analyze educational strategies for mitigating religion-based conflict potential across five strategically selected regions of Indonesia representing diverse urban and rural characteristics. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design (Shahin et al., 2026), the research investigates how local educational actors, community leaders, indigenous wisdom, and public policies interact to strengthen social cohesion and community resilience against religious polarization. Particular attention is given to the contributions of educational practices that promote interfaith understanding, collaborative learning, and community participation in conflict prevention.

By integrating educational perspectives into conflict mitigation, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on peace education and social cohesion in multicultural societies. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, religious leaders, and community organizations seeking to develop adaptive educational policies that strengthen religious harmony and sustainable peace across Indonesia's diverse social contexts (Revaldhi et al., 2025).

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach using a multiple-case study design to explore educational strategies for mitigating religion-based conflict potential across diverse socio-cultural settings in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions within their natural contexts (Tarigan et al., 2024). The multiple-case

study design facilitated comparative analysis across different geographical and socio-cultural environments, allowing the identification of both shared and context-specific educational practices that contribute to conflict prevention and social cohesion.

The research was conducted in five strategically selected regions representing both urban and rural communities with varying histories of religious diversity and conflict potential: Jakarta, Surakarta, Ambon, Poso, and Tasikmalaya. These locations were purposively selected due to their distinctive socio-religious characteristics and their relevance to understanding the dynamics of religion-based conflict mitigation in Indonesia. Urban sites provided insights into challenges associated with digital polarization, identity politics, and multicultural interactions, whereas rural communities offered perspectives on indigenous wisdom, community-based reconciliation, and culturally embedded educational practices.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in educational activities, interfaith initiatives, community leadership, or local conflict mitigation efforts. The participants included religious leaders, school principals, teachers, university lecturers, community leaders, local government officials, youth representatives, civil society activists, and members of Interfaith Harmony Forums (FKUB). These diverse stakeholders provided multiple perspectives regarding educational initiatives designed to strengthen religious tolerance, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques: in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Interviews explored participants' experiences in implementing peace education, multicultural learning, religious moderation programs, and community-based educational initiatives. Participant observation enabled

the researchers to examine educational interactions, interfaith dialogue activities, community meetings, and collaborative learning practices within their natural settings. Documentary analysis included local government regulations, educational policies, school programs, community reports, religious moderation campaign materials, and digital educational resources related to conflict prevention.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed methodological triangulation through three complementary dimensions: source triangulation, method triangulation, and perspective triangulation. Source triangulation involved collecting information from multiple stakeholder groups across the five research locations. Method triangulation integrated interview data, observational evidence, and documentary materials to cross-validate emerging findings. Perspective triangulation allowed the researchers to examine how participants from different educational, religious, cultural, and institutional backgrounds interpreted conflict mitigation practices, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Anas, 2025).

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following an iterative coding process. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentary evidence were first organized and coded to identify recurring concepts related to educational strategies for conflict mitigation. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader themes reflecting patterns of peace education, multicultural learning, interfaith collaboration, community participation, local wisdom, policy implementation, and social resilience. Cross-case analysis was then conducted to compare similarities and differences between urban and rural communities, enabling the identification of educational practices that were transferable across different socio-cultural contexts.

The trustworthiness of the study was established by applying the qualitative criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Continuous comparison among multiple data sources, prolonged engagement with participants, reflective field notes, and peer discussions were employed to strengthen the validity of the findings. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, this study emphasizes analytical transferability by providing context-rich descriptions that may inform educational policies and conflict mitigation practices in communities with similar socio-cultural characteristics.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. All participants voluntarily agreed to participate after receiving detailed information regarding the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research process, and all collected data were used exclusively for academic purposes. The researchers also remained sensitive to the religious and cultural diversity of participants by ensuring neutrality, respect, and inclusiveness during interviews, observations, and data interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Results

The findings reveal that educational strategies for mitigating religion-based conflict in Indonesia are strongly influenced by the social, cultural, and institutional characteristics of each research setting. Analysis across the five selected case-study locations—Jakarta, Surakarta, Ambon, Poso, and Tasikmalaya—identified three interconnected factors that consistently contributed to successful conflict mitigation:

(1) the strength of interfaith social networks, (2) the mediation capacity of local educational and community actors, and (3) adaptive educational and public policies responsive to local socio-cultural contexts.

Educational Strategies in Urban Communities

In urban areas such as Jakarta and Surakarta, religion-based tensions frequently emerged through social media polarization, identity-based political campaigns, misinformation, and competition among religious organizations. Nevertheless, these cities demonstrated relatively strong institutional capacities to prevent conflict escalation through collaborative educational initiatives.

The Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), educational institutions, universities, and community learning centers played significant roles in facilitating interreligious dialogue, organizing multicultural education programs, and promoting religious moderation. Schools incorporated values of tolerance, democratic citizenship, and intercultural understanding into both curricular and extracurricular activities. Digital literacy campaigns further equipped students and young people with critical thinking skills necessary to identify hate speech, religious misinformation, and online extremism.

Youth-led interfaith communities also emerged as important educational agents by creating peace narratives through digital platforms, social campaigns, and collaborative community service activities. These initiatives strengthened mutual trust among diverse religious groups while reducing opportunities for conflict escalation in online environments.

Educational Strategies in Rural Communities

The findings from rural communities—including Ambon, Poso, and Tasikmalaya—

demonstrate different patterns of educational intervention. Unlike urban settings where digital polarization dominated, rural communities continued to experience latent tensions rooted in historical conflict memories, community segregation, and inherited social identities.

Consequently, educational strategies relied more heavily on indigenous knowledge, local wisdom, and culturally responsive learning approaches. Religious education was frequently integrated with traditional community values emphasizing mutual respect, collective responsibility, and reconciliation.

In Ambon and Poso, customary ceremonies, community reconciliation forums, and interfaith cultural activities functioned as informal educational spaces where younger generations learned peaceful coexistence through direct participation. Local religious leaders, customary leaders, teachers, and community elders served as respected educators who transmitted values of forgiveness, empathy, and social solidarity across generations.

Similarly, in Tasikmalaya, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), respected religious scholars, and community deliberation forums became influential educational institutions promoting religious moderation while maintaining local cultural traditions. Rather than emphasizing doctrinal differences, educational activities focused on strengthening social responsibility, dialogue, and community cooperation.

The Role of Local Educational Actors

Across all research locations, local educational actors demonstrated considerable influence in preventing religion-based conflict. Teachers, school principals, religious leaders, village heads, youth facilitators, university lecturers, and civil society organizations collectively functioned as mediators capable of

transforming potential tensions into constructive dialogue.

Participants consistently emphasized that educational leadership rooted in community trust was more effective than purely administrative interventions. Educational actors possessing strong social legitimacy successfully encouraged collaborative problem-solving, facilitated interfaith communication, and promoted peaceful conflict resolution among diverse community members.

Challenges to Educational Conflict Mitigation

Despite these positive findings, several limitations remain. Coordination among educational institutions, local governments, religious organizations, and civil society is often fragmented. Furthermore, educational policies promoting religious moderation frequently adopt standardized national approaches without sufficiently accommodating local cultural diversity.

Several participants expressed concern that top-down educational programs occasionally fail to address community-specific experiences, historical memories, and cultural identities. Consequently, educational interventions require greater flexibility and stronger community participation to ensure their long-term effectiveness.

Overall, the findings indicate that successful educational strategies combine formal educational institutions with culturally embedded community learning practices while encouraging collaboration among actors at multiple societal levels.

Discussion

The findings confirm that mitigating religion-based conflict in Indonesia requires educational approaches that extend beyond conventional classroom instruction toward

broader community-based learning ecosystems. Effective peacebuilding education depends not only on curriculum development but also on meaningful interaction among educational institutions, religious organizations, local governments, and community members.

The identification of interfaith social networks, local mediation capacity, and adaptive educational policies aligns with theories of social cohesion, which emphasize that peaceful societies are built through continuous interaction, trust, and collaborative learning rather than solely through legal regulation. These findings further support the transferability principle proposed by (Carragee, 2011), suggesting that educational innovations should always be adapted to local socio-cultural contexts instead of applying uniform national models.

The study also demonstrates that formal educational institutions—including schools, universities, and community education centers—serve as important platforms for cultivating democratic citizenship, intercultural competence, and religious moderation. However, institutional efforts become substantially more effective when complemented by informal educational environments such as families, religious communities, indigenous cultural institutions, and youth organizations. This integration reflects the principles of lifelong learning, recognizing that peace education extends beyond formal schooling into everyday community life.

Urban communities illustrate how digital education has become increasingly important for conflict prevention. As misinformation, hate speech, and identity-based political narratives rapidly circulate through social media, digital literacy education equips young people with critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate online information responsibly. Consequently, integrating digital citizenship education with peace education represents an effective strategy for

strengthening resilience against religious polarization in contemporary societies.

Conversely, rural communities demonstrate that culturally responsive education remains indispensable for sustainable peacebuilding. Indigenous wisdom, customary reconciliation practices, community storytelling, and local religious traditions function as authentic educational resources that strengthen collective identity while promoting inclusiveness. These findings reinforce culturally responsive pedagogy, which argues that educational practices become more meaningful when grounded in learners' cultural experiences and local knowledge.

Another important contribution concerns the role of local educational leadership. Teachers, religious leaders, customary leaders, and youth facilitators function not merely as information providers but as social mediators capable of transforming conflict into opportunities for dialogue and collaborative learning. Their credibility within local communities enables educational initiatives to influence attitudes and behaviors more effectively than externally imposed interventions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that educational strategies for mitigating religion-based conflict in Indonesia cannot rely solely on formal regulations, administrative mechanisms, or government-led interventions. Although structural approaches—including legal frameworks, Interfaith Harmony Forums (FKUB), and national religious moderation programs—provide an essential institutional foundation for conflict prevention, their effectiveness largely depends on their ability to engage with the social, cultural, and symbolic realities of local communities. Consequently, educational initiatives must extend beyond policy implementation by

The findings further suggest that educational policy should shift from predominantly top-down implementation toward participatory, community-centered models. Bottom-up educational planning encourages local ownership, strengthens institutional trust, and ensures that peace education reflects the realities experienced by diverse communities. Such an approach supports sustainable conflict prevention by positioning communities not as passive recipients of government programs but as active partners in educational transformation.

Overall, this study demonstrates that education constitutes one of the most powerful instruments for mitigating religion-based conflict in multicultural societies. Effective educational strategies integrate peace education, multicultural learning, religious moderation, digital citizenship, and indigenous knowledge into comprehensive learning ecosystems that strengthen empathy, dialogue, mutual respect, and social cohesion. These integrated approaches provide practical guidance for policymakers, educators, and community leaders seeking to promote sustainable peace and inclusive development across Indonesia's diverse urban and rural communities.

fostering meaningful community participation, intercultural understanding, and sustained dialogue among diverse religious groups.

The findings demonstrate that religion-based conflicts often originate not from the absence of regulations but from competing interpretations of identity, collective memories, social exclusion, and failures in communication across communities. Therefore, educational strategies should move beyond knowledge transmission toward transformative learning that develops empathy, critical thinking, conflict resolution skills, and respect for diversity. Peace education, multicultural education, interfaith dialogue, and religious

moderation should become integral components of both formal and non-formal educational systems to strengthen social resilience against religious polarization.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of culturally responsive and community-based education. Every community possesses unique historical experiences, cultural traditions, and social values that require context-sensitive educational interventions rather than standardized national approaches. Local actors—including teachers, religious leaders, customary leaders, youth organizations, women's groups, and community facilitators—should be recognized as key educational agents capable of promoting reconciliation, strengthening social trust, and fostering collaborative learning within their communities.

Rather than positioning communities as passive recipients of government intervention or merely as vulnerable populations, educational policies should empower citizens as active participants in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Participatory educational approaches encourage communities to identify potential sources of tension, develop locally relevant mechanisms for dialogue and mediation, and cultivate shared values that support peaceful coexistence. Such a paradigm reflects a transformative model of education that promotes democratic participation, social responsibility, and collective ownership of sustainable peace.

Ultimately, the future of religion-based conflict mitigation in Indonesia depends on the successful integration of structural policies with locally grounded educational practices that respect cultural diversity and community experiences. Effective educational strategies should bridge formal institutions with indigenous knowledge, symbolic community practices, and participatory learning processes. By

integrating peace education, multicultural education, digital citizenship, and culturally responsive pedagogy into national and local educational systems, Indonesia can strengthen social cohesion, promote religious tolerance, and build resilient communities capable of sustaining peaceful coexistence within its multicultural society. These findings offer practical implications for policymakers, educators, religious institutions, and civil society organizations seeking to develop inclusive educational policies that contribute to long-term peace and national unity.

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