

The Urgency of Karen Armstrong Compassion Value in the Context of Religious Pluralism at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani

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Abstract

This research highlights the importance of implementing Karen Armstrong's compassion values at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani to support harmony in religious diversity. Compassion must be taught in a pluralist educational environment to form empathy and strong character from an early age. Given the limited understanding of pluralism among students and the lack of integration of compassion values in the curriculum, this study aims to explore effective strategies in instilling these values. The method used was qualitative research with data collection through observation and in-depth interviews. The results showed that the value of compassion could increase mutual respect and support among students, which is realized through collaborative activities such as religious holiday celebrations and interfaith prayers. Teachers are essential in internalizing compassion through narrative, discussion, and cooperative learning approaches. In conclusion, implementing the value of compassion at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani not only creates a harmonious and safe environment but also forms a young generation that can live peacefully amid religious differences, showing that differences are strengths that can be embraced together.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious diversity is both a gift and a threat to this nation. Indeed, religion is an integral part of as many people have a fanatical attitude toward their religion, which has resulted in fractured relations between religious communities in Indonesia (Tuju et al., 2022). The results of Yasin, (2021) since 1996 the plurality of socio-religious life in Indonesia has faced multiple tests. Several ethnic violence and religious conflicts occurred on a massive scale such as the Sambas, Banyuwangi, Situbondo, Poso, and Ambon cases, church bombings on Christmas and New Year's Eve, Bali bombings, violence against Ahmadiyah (Parung, Lombok and Kuningan) to disputes over the establishment of houses of worship and acts of violence in Bekasi Regency.

In October 2019, the Commission for the Disappeared and Victims of Violence (KontraS) detailed the majority of perpetrators of violence committed by fellow civilians (163 cases). Then the government (177 cases), mass organizations (148 cases), and the police (92 cases) (Suryarandika, 2019). The phenomenon of religious violence cannot be seen in isolation as religious violence alone, but must be observed as the result of the interrelationship of various factors. One of them is through the education sector.

Teachers in schools who act as the spearhead of education from the lowest to the highest level are almost untouched by the waves of thought struggles and religious thought discourse around the issue of pluralism and interfaith dialogue (Hammersley-Fletcher et al., 2018; Isnaini, 2018; Shofan, 2011). Teachers are the first mediators to translate the values of tolerance and pluralism to students, who at a later stage also play an active role in transforming tolerance awareness more intensively and massively (Arifianto et al., 2021; Ayu & Dirgantoro, 2023; Dalilah et al., 2022).

For this reason, it is not too surprising that the increasing forms of religious radicalism practiced by some people pose a severe threat to pluralism education, which emphasizes mutual openness and dialogue (Sapendi, 2012; Sumaktoyo, 2017). Mutual respect and commitment to building a modern nation include many religions and ethnicities. Pluralism is the symbol of a prosperous plural society. Therefore, the curriculum should be well-designed to give students an understanding of the importance of pluralism in religious and social life. The curriculum should be pluralism-based (Mahfud, 2008; Syakban, 2019)

As one of the educational environments, school is a social system that develops the attitudes, values and norms that children already have in a particular social climate (Gálvez-Nieto et al., 2022; Lundberg & Abdelzadeh, 2019). Since the school's social climate has a significant influence on students, including in developing attitudes, beliefs, values and norms related to intergroup relations, if the social, educational environment that children have is different, the influence on behaviour and values will also be different (Henry et al., 2011).

The value of compassion must be taught in a pluralistic educational environment. Compassion as a form of love in the soul of a human being. Humans live together with different traits and characters. This difference makes humans begin to learn the meaning of life intolerance by making Compassion a guide. Fostering a child with compassion in an educational environment has a tremendous influence on the development stage of attitude, character, and character until adulthood (Permatasari, 2022).

The dimension of compassion proposed by Karen Armstrong must be implemented in a plural educational environment to create peace, harmony, and love among school members, which can nurture religious life. Armstrong promotes pluralism as a way of thinking and acting in the face of other traditions and diversity contained in each religion (Armstrong, 1999). This concept is best suited to be taught to the school community.

In the context of the Public Junior High School 2 Sentani research site, students sometimes lack an adequate understanding of religious diversity and the importance of pluralism. This makes it difficult to foster an atmosphere of inclusiveness and respect. Students' ability to communicate and practice tolerance can be hampered by a limited understanding or inappropriate attitudes about the principles and practices of other religions.

Meanwhile, teachers and the curriculum have not explicitly taught the values of compassion in certain subjects, so they do not have a strong foundation in understanding the importance of respecting religious differences and maintaining harmonious relationships. The potential for external influences to stimulate religious fanaticism can also be a problem. Students who do not understand the values of compassion and religious diversity are more vulnerable to these influences.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Dimensions of Compassionate Living from Karen Armstrong's Perspective

Compassion refers to a person's behavioral ability to understand what others are feeling, resulting in a concern to help ease the burden of those around them (Permatasari, 2022, p. 3). Karen Armstrong, a Catholic nun, was determined to learn about religious diversity. Armstrong promoted pluralism as a way of thinking to deal with each religion's traditions and other diversities.

The golden rule, an idea found by Armstrong in religious traditions, contains teachings on commendable actions between fellow humans to live in peace despite diversity. This Golden Rule will be centred on the value of Compassion which will study 12 steps towards a life of compassion by Karen Armstrong's concept of Compassion which consists of (1) learning about compassion, (2) look at your world, (3) compassion for yourself, (4)

empathy, (5) attention, (6) action, (7) how little we know, (8) how we should speak to others, (9) care for all, (10) knowledge, (11) recognition, (12) love your enemy (Armstrong, 2012).

Compassion: Philosophical Foundations of Religious Pluralism

Karen Armstrong understands that religious pluralism is a reality that emerges after the fact that religious diversity is an inevitability. Armstrong sees that this pluralistic tendency cannot be separated or eliminated from everyday life. Pluralism is part of the diversity that is God's destiny that cannot be erased. It is a reality that has merged with the social life of society (Saraswati, 2013, p. 192)

The religious pluralism that Armstrong refers to is to be open to religion. Armstrong advises everyone to make religious comparisons. This religious comparison is intended for humanity to get to know the reality of other religions, not that it has to compare to determine which one is more correct than the others. (Saraswati, 2013, p. 192). Armstrong finds this core teaching in all religious traditions on earth, which is most evident in monotheistic or monotheistic religions. For example, in Judaism, Islam and Buddhism. In Judaism, the value of compassion is contained in Shalom. Shalom, which means peace, contains a concept that is more than just the absence of conflict but can also be interpreted as 'wholeness, completion', as a positive, harmonious principle that can reconcile opposites (Armstrong, 1999: 53).

Religious Pluralism Education in Schools

Pluralism is an effort to build theological normative awareness and social awareness, where we live in a plural society regarding religion, culture, ethnicity, and various other social diversities. Establishing harmony between religious communities in a country with cultural and religious pluralism is an urgent need (Wasim, 2005, p. 9).

Efforts to break the ice of pluralism discourse can also be accelerated by intensifying pluralism and multiculturalism education in schools. Educational institutions are the most appropriate media to separate one's mindset. Religious teachers in schools who act as the spearhead of religious education from the lowest to the highest level are almost untouched by the waves of thought struggles and religious thought discourse around the issue of pluralism and inter-religious dialogue. These teachers are the first mediators to translate the values of tolerance and pluralism to students, who, at a later stage, also actively transform tolerance awareness more intensively and massively.

Mutual respect and commitment to building a modern nation include many religions and ethnicities. The education curriculum should be designed as well as possible to provide students with an understanding of the importance of pluralism in religious and social life.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

In researching 'the urgency of Karen Armstrong's compassion value in the context of religious pluralism at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani,' the research method used is qualitative. Qualitative research method according to Creswell, (2010) is an approach used to explore and understand the meaning given by individuals or groups to a social or human problem. This method comprehensively explores the understanding, views, and experiences of teachers and students at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani related to this research topic. Data collection can be done through interviews with students and teachers. Researchers asked various questions openly so that research subjects could voice their experiences as well as possible without being limited by the researcher's perspective or previous research findings. The researcher also observed at Public Junior High School 2 Sentani as an active observer.

The researcher can observe the interaction between students and teachers and the overall school environment to understand the daily dynamics and potential implementation of the

value of compassion. The researcher also collected and analyzed documents such as the curriculum, character education programs, and school policies related to the value of compassion and religious pluralism to provide an overview of how much this value has been implemented in the curriculum and school activities.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Compassion Values

Compassion means a combination of compassion, pity, empathy, and even ego suppression (Saraswati, 2013). On the other hand, the term compassion can be interpreted as an attitude that appreciates and takes part in the position of others. Compassion can be interpreted as a consistent form of altruism. Compassion becomes the principle of action when dealing with others. Compassion is practiced as a form of altruism to bring satisfaction and inner peace. A demand resides in every human being, which cannot be described or said and can be fulfilled by practicing compassion. The practice of compassion can begin by suppressing one's ego in dealing with others who may be different from ourselves (Saraswati, 2013).

In schools, compassion can be applied to build an attitude of respect and understanding of the position of others, especially in a diverse environment. The value of compassion can also be interpreted as a form of consistent altruism, where every action of students and teachers is based on selfless concern for others, and is directed towards creating a peaceful and harmonious environment.

The research found the importance of compassion in building interfaith harmony in SMP Negeri 2 Sentani and the community for several reasons. First, the school and the community illustrate the pluralistic conditions that exist around them. In this diversity, it is important to create harmonization between religious adherents so that the environment remains safe, comfortable, and peaceful. Second, compassion inspires and motivates all school members to respect and support each other so they can be good examples in interacting with each other.

In addition, everyone wants to live in peace despite different backgrounds, and with compassion, these differences are not a barrier but something that can be embraced well. Everyone also has an important role in maintaining harmony, so every contribution is valuable in building interfaith relations. Last but not least, by instilling the values of compassion, students learn not to see religious differences as limitations. If instilled early on, these positive values will become everyday habits that strengthen harmony amid diversity.

Schools in Indonesia have been practicing the values of pluralism, including compassion, positive thinking, disciplined/honest values, and togetherness, to instill the values of religious harmony (Khoirul Umah & Achmad Yusuf, 2019). An advanced view of religious education replaces 'ideological confinement' with 'ideological exploration' and provides students with interfaith religious education. (Grimmitt, 1994).

Research findings also support the cultivation of compassion in the context of religious diversity in various ways. First, schools are responsible for guiding and educating students to respect each other, especially in the existing diversity. Students are actively involved in various religious and spiritual activities with one vision of universal love: loving all beings regardless of differences.

The school supports tolerance by organizing religious holiday celebrations and designing regular religious activities in which students can be directly involved. For example, during Eid al-Fitr celebrations, Christian students help prepare the activities, and vice versa in celebrating other religious holidays. This teaches students that no religious differences separate them because, basically, all are equal in the eyes of God.

In addition, the value of compassion is embedded in the school’s vision and mission through religious learning and implementing Project Pancasila. The school also encourages togetherness by opening and closing lessons with alternating prayers from all religions and conducting joint prayers during morning roll calls. With this approach, teachers not only teach students in terms of knowledge but also instill character and compassion for others so that the value of compassion becomes part of the daily lives of students at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani.

Table 1.1 School Policy on the Implementation of Compassion Value

No	Concrete Steps	Description
1	Guide and educate students to respect each other	Schools are responsible for guiding students to respect each other amid religious diversity, creating a harmonious environment
2	Engaging students in religious, spiritual activities with a vision of universal love	Students are included in spiritual activities that carry the vision of compassion without distinction, teaching love to all beings
3	Collaborative celebration of religious holidays	The school organises celebrations of religious holidays by involving students from other religions to help with preparations, for example Christian students help during Eid al-Fitr, and vice versa
4	Embedding the value of compassion through the school's vision and mission as well as Project Pancasila	The value of compassion is integrated into the school's vision and mission and Project Pancasila activities, thus becoming the basis of character education in the school
5	Alternate prayers according to religion at the beginning and end of the lesson	At the beginning and end of each lesson and morning roll call, prayers are said alternately by all religions, fostering mutual respect
6	Character education by teachers	Teachers not only teach knowledge, but also instil the value of compassion for others as part of character education

Effective Approaches and Strategies

The research found that the approaches and strategies applied in teaching Karen Armstrong's compassion value to students include: First, teachers instill compassion in students from an early age so that they get used to showing care and concern for others. In addition, teachers also instill the value of empathy in the form of concrete actions, such as helping friends of different religions. This helps students understand the importance of helping regardless of differences.

The approaches and strategies align with the use of a multimodality curriculum, which involves various teaching methods to increase empathy and compassion. A systematic review found that curricula using multiple modalities such as communication, mindfulness, and early clinical exposure showed significant improvements in students' empathy and compassion (Menezes et al., 2021).

Another finding is that teachers not only teach the subject matter but also act as parents who provide advice and support to students so they feel accepted and valued. Teachers also encourage students to love each other so that they do not see differences as barriers in friendship relationships. The teacher invites students to pray together to reinforce the values of togetherness and love. With these approaches, it is hoped that the value of compassion can be embedded in students and become part of their daily behavior.

Teachers use several methods and activities to help students understand and internalize the value of compassion. Firstly, teachers often use stories and discussions with students. Through stories, students can learn about the value of compassion and empathy from various perspectives, and discuss to understand and feel the feelings of others. The storytelling process helps students develop empathy, tolerance and respect for cultural differences, and strengthens positive relationships in a culturally diverse classroom (Baskerville, 2011).

In addition, the teacher applies cooperative learning, which encourages students to work together in groups. This method helps students learn to appreciate and support each other. Teachers play an essential role in organizing and supporting student interactions according to cooperative learning principles, which include providing more help and encouragement during group learning (Abramczyk & Jurkowski, 2020; Gillies, 2006).

Teachers also integrate the value of compassion in religious activities and daily learning. Teachers always give attention and love to students as a real example. Teachers also become friends and parents to students and take the time to play and tell stories with them. In this way, students feel valued and accepted, making it easier for them to internalize compassion's value in their daily lives.

5. CONCLUSION

The application of the value of compassion at SMP Negeri 2 Sentani is very important in strengthening harmony amid religious diversity. The value of compassion, which emphasizes compassion and empathy towards others, has been successfully integrated into various school activities, such as joint celebrations of religious holidays and alternating prayers from various faiths. The school is shaping a generation ready to live in harmony in a pluralistic society by teaching students to respect and support their friends regardless of religious background.

Through the compassionate approach applied by teachers, students not only gain knowledge but also build strong character. Through storytelling, discussion, and cooperative learning, the value of compassion is instilled and lived out in students' daily interactions. This helps to create a harmonious, safe, and inclusive school environment where differences become strengths rather than barriers.

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