

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF ADOLESCENTS' INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT IN RURAL INDONESIA



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Abstract

This study examines how adolescents in Kalurahan Watusigar, a village in Yogyakarta, Indonesia known for its longstanding religious diversity, understand and practice religious tolerance in their daily lives. In this community, Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other faiths have coexisted for generations, making it a significant setting to explore interfaith experiences among adolescents in a rural plural context. Using a phenomenological approach with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), semi-structured interviews were conducted with three adolescents aged 15–18 who actively engage in interfaith interactions. The analysis identified six superordinate themes: (1) diversity as a lived social reality, (2) tolerance and appreciation of differences as core values, (3) religious freedom as a personal right, (4) positive interfaith social interaction, (5) cultural participation and empathy toward other traditions, and (6) collaboration across religious boundaries. A unique theme highlighted the affective and participatory dimension of tolerance. The findings demonstrate that in Watusigar, adolescent religious tolerance is not merely a normative ideal but an embodied and internalized social practice. By situating the lived experiences of youth within a plural rural setting, this study contributes to global discussions on adolescence, interfaith engagement, and peacebuilding. It also underscores the significance of character education grounded in religious moderation for fostering inclusive and harmonious interfaith relations.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana remaja di Kalurahan Watusigar, sebuah desa di Yogyakarta yang dikenal dengan keragaman agama, memahami dan mempraktikkan toleransi beragama dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Di desa ini, Muslim, Kristen, dan pemeluk agama lain telah hidup berdampingan selama beberapa generasi, menjadikannya lokasi penting untuk menelaah pengalaman lintas iman remaja dalam konteks pedesaan yang plural. Dengan pendekatan fenomenologi dan Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), wawancara semi-terstruktur dilakukan terhadap tiga remaja berusia 15–18 tahun yang aktif dalam interaksi lintas iman. Analisis menghasilkan enam tema utama: (1) keberagaman sebagai realitas sosial yang dihayati, (2) toleransi dan penghargaan perbedaan sebagai nilai inti, (3) kebebasan beragama sebagai hak personal, (4) interaksi sosial lintas iman yang positif, (5) partisipasi budaya dan empati terhadap tradisi lain, serta (6) kolaborasi antaragama. Satu tema unik menunjukkan dimensi afektif dan partisipatoris dari toleransi. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa di Watusigar, toleransi beragama pada remaja bukan sekadar ideal normatif, tetapi praktik sosial yang diwujudkan dan diinternalisasi. Dengan menempatkan pengalaman remaja di konteks pedesaan yang plural, studi ini berkontribusi pada diskursus global tentang pemuda, keterlibatan lintas iman, dan pembangunan perdamaian, serta menekankan pentingnya pendidikan karakter berbasis moderasi beragama guna menumbuhkan relasi antariman yang inklusif dan harmonis.

INTRODUCTION

Watusigar is known as a region that upholds the value of religious moderation in the daily lives of its community members (Sorot Gunungkidul, 2023). Adolescents in this area grow up in a pluralistic environment that allows them to form tolerant views toward differences. This commitment to religious moderation is reflected in daily practices such as active participation in interfaith celebrations, youth involvement in collaborative community projects with members of different faiths, and the mutual respect shown during religious holidays through shared greetings and support. However, few studies have specifically explored adolescents' understanding and practices of religious tolerance within this context (Untoro & Putri, 2019).

Adolescents represent an age group in the process of forming their identity and are highly susceptible to environmental influences. Within the framework of positive psychology, religious tolerance can be viewed as an essential aspect of building healthy and meaningful social relationships (Pedrotti, 2011). Tolerance is not merely about accepting differences but also about the ability to empathize and appreciate diversity as a source of social well-being (Janah et al., 2024). The understanding and application of tolerance among adolescents have a significant impact on creating an inclusive, harmonious, and peaceful society. Therefore, examining how adolescents interpret and express tolerant attitudes in their everyday lives is a crucial effort in strengthening character education and national values.

Furthermore, the dynamics of tolerance among adolescents reflect the future direction of religious life in society. If adolescents are raised in an environment that promotes respect for differences and freedom of belief, it is highly likely that future communities will be more tolerant and inclusive. In Indonesia's pluralistic context, this is crucial to ensuring the continuity of a peaceful, just, and respectful society (Suparjo et al., 2022).

This study aims to understand how adolescents in Kalurahan Watusigar perceive and practice the values of tolerance in their daily lives, as well as to explore the internal and external factors that influence these attitudes. By placing adolescents as the central focus, this research seeks to uncover the internal and external dynamics that shape tolerance, as well as their contributions to interreligious harmony at the local level.

This research uses a phenomenological approach, involving three adolescents aged 15 to 18 years who reside in Kalurahan Watusigar. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each conducted once with a duration of 25–30 minutes. Participants were selected purposively based on their active involvement in interfaith interactions. To ensure confidentiality, participants are referred to by initials: RMP, BSA, and KR. These pseudonyms represent three different adolescents involved in this study. Prior to the interviews, participants were given informed consent as an ethical form of approval for their involvement in the study.

Data analysis in this study employed the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, which aims to understand the meaning of adolescents' lived experiences from their own perspectives (Kahija, 2017). The analysis process was carried out by reading the interview transcripts repeatedly to develop a deep understanding of the content. The researcher then identified emergent themes directly from the participants' statements, formulating them into key phrases or keywords representing important meanings from their experiences.

The emergent themes from each participant were then compared to identify similarities in meaning, which were further grouped into superordinate themes. Some themes appeared across all participants, some in two, and a few were unique to one

participant. This process reflects the idiographic principle in IPA, which emphasizes a deep exploration of individual experiences.

In the IPA approach, the researcher plays an active role as the primary interpreter who seeks to understand the participants' experiences empathetically and reflectively while maintaining *epoché*, a conscious effort to suspend personal judgments and assumptions throughout the analysis process. The entire process was conducted carefully and ethically, ensuring the confidentiality of the participants (Kahija, 2017).

To enhance data validity, member checking was used as a validation technique. This involved asking participants to review and verify the transcribed and analyzed data to ensure that the researcher's interpretation accurately reflected their experiences and intentions. This approach aimed to minimize interpretive bias and strengthen the credibility of the data collected in this qualitative study.

The data analysis generated six superordinate themes that reflect the participants' perspectives and experiences in practicing religious tolerance. The following thematic findings not only illustrate how adolescents practice religious tolerance in their everyday lives, but also reveal the internal dispositions and external social influences that shape these practices.

DIVERSITY AS A LIVED SOCIAL REALITY

Participants in this study consistently stated that living side by side with people of different religions is an inseparable part of their daily lives. They grew up and developed in a pluralistic social environment and have been accustomed to facing religious diversity from an early age, both in the family, school, and community settings. This made them view diversity not only as something normative but also as a reality that is accepted and experienced comfortably and without resistance.

No	Interview Excerpts (Indonesia)	Interview Excerpts (English)	Interpretation
1	"Saya sendiri tinggal di desa ini yang memang terkenal dengan moderasi beragama." [RMP, Baris 10 – 12]	"I live in this village which is well known for its religious moderation." [RMP, Line 10 – 12]	The participant acknowledges that their community promotes religious tolerance, providing a strong environmental foundation for pluralistic values.
2	"Saya punya teman nonis di lingkungan sekolah dan lingkungan rumah juga ada." [BSA, Baris 10 – 11]	"I have non-Muslim friends both at school and in my neighborhood." [BSA, Line 10 – 11]	Indicates that interfaith interaction is not limited to one context but is present in multiple daily life settings, reinforcing normalization.
3	"Kayaknya sekitar 3 orang yang beda agama sama saya. Tapi nggak pernah masalah, kita semua bisa akrab" [KR, Baris 17 – 19]	"There are about three classmates who have different religions, but it has never been a problem. We all get along well." [KR, Line 17 – 19]	Demonstrates that religious difference does not hinder social bonding or friendship among adolescents in this pluralistic community.

Table 1. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Diversity as a Lived Social Reality

Religious diversity in this context is not seen as a threat or a source of conflict, but as an element that enriches social interaction and broadens their perspectives. Participants mentioned that they never felt there were barriers or limits in interacting with friends of different beliefs. On the contrary, they felt that diversity gave them the opportunity to

learn from other points of view, strengthen their empathy, and deepen their understanding of universal human values.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Jadi ketemu teman dengan agama yang berbeda udah biasa. Di tempat saya ini, hampir semua orang punya latar belakang agama yang berbeda, jadi saya nggak merasa itu masalah, kak. Kami semua sudah terbiasa hidup berdampingan." [KR, Baris 27 – 32]	"Meeting friends from different religions is normal. In my area, almost everyone comes from a different religious background, so I never see it as a problem. We've all grown up living side by side." [KR, Line 27 – 32]	The participant expresses that religious diversity is fully normalized in their social environment. Instead of being a barrier, it serves as a daily reality that encourages openness, understanding, and learning from multiple perspectives.
2	"Kami tetap bisa hidup bersama dengan nyaman." [BSA, Baris 90 – 91]	"We can still live together comfortably." [BSA, Line 90 – 91]	Indicates that religious differences do not hinder social relationships or coexistence. Diversity is perceived as a natural and enriching aspect of life that fosters comfort, empathy, and the internalization of universal human values.

Table 2. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Diversity as a Lived Social Reality

Religion is not used as the main standard in forming friendships or collaborations; instead, it is seen as part of an individual's identity that complements the dynamics of social life. The relationships they build are based on values of togetherness, mutual respect, and care among individuals, not on similarities in religion or belief backgrounds. In other words, they have gone beyond the stage of passive tolerance to a form of active acceptance, where differences are not only tolerated but also understood and accepted as part of a social reality that does not need to be changed.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Saya sudah tinggal di desa yang warganya beragam agamanya." [RMP, Baris 33 – 34]	"I've lived in a village where the people come from various religious backgrounds." [RMP, Line 33 – 34]	The participant views religious identity as a natural part of their environment. It is not a dividing factor but a complement to social life, indicating a mature form of acceptance where difference is fully embedded in daily interactions.
2	"Kami di tempat ini sudah terbiasa untuk saling menerima tanpa memaksakan pandangan masing-masing, kak." [BSA, Baris 77 – 79]	"Here, we are already used to accepting one another without forcing our views on others." [BSA, Line 77 – 79]	Shows that interfaith relationships are based on mutual respect and freedom of belief. Tolerance is not passive, but active, expressed through genuine acceptance of others' rights to hold different views, without pressure to conform.

Table 3. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Diversity as a Lived Social Reality

These findings reinforce the concept that acceptance of diversity is an important indicator of social and emotional maturity in adolescents. In line with Widana &

Julianingsih (2022), who stated that acceptance of religious differences is the foundation of a harmonious society, these findings show that participants have internalized these values not only as discourse but as real practices in their lives. Thus, the life of diversity lived by adolescents in Kalurahan Watusigar becomes a concrete example of how the value of tolerance can grow organically in a supportive environment.

TOLERANCE AND APPRECIATION OF DIFFERENCES AS A CORE VALUE

Tolerance is no longer understood merely as a passive attitude, such as not disturbing or questioning differences, but has evolved into an active stance of appreciating and celebrating diversity. The adolescents who participated in this study demonstrated a high level of awareness that differences in belief are not obstacles to building positive and equal relationships with others. They view religious differences as a natural part of social life that, in fact, enriches interactions and broadens perspectives.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Di desa saya, orang-orang memang saling menghargai perbedaan agama."</i> [RMP, baris 34–35]	<i>"In my village, people really respect religious differences."</i> [RMP, Line 34–35]	Reflects a community – wide norm of active respect toward religious diversity. The participant's experience indicates that tolerance is not merely about coexisting but involves conscious appreciation of differences in everyday life.
2	<i>"Diajarkan untuk saling menghargai."</i> [BSA, baris 54]	<i>"We are taught to respect each other."</i> [BSA, Line 54]	Demonstrates that the value of mutual respect is instilled early and becomes an active social norm. This shows that tolerance among youth is shaped through social learning and reinforced in both family and educational environments.

Table 4. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Tolerance and Appreciation of Differences

This appreciative attitude did not emerge spontaneously but was formed through a long process that began in childhood. Participants revealed that respect for other religious traditions and beliefs had been introduced and instilled by parents, teachers, and the surrounding environment from an early age. This is reflected in everyday practices such as offering greetings on religious holidays, showing respect when friends are worshipping, and maintaining polite behavior in conversations involving religious issues. In other words, tolerance has become part of their habitus, a value not only learned cognitively but also embedded through consistent practice.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Sejak kecil sudah diajarkan untuk saling menghargai, kak."</i> [RMP, baris 66–67]	<i>"Since I was a child, I've been taught to respect others."</i> [RMP, Line 66–67]	Demonstrates that the value of tolerance is instilled early through family and community education, supporting the idea that it is not spontaneous but intentionally nurtured.
2	<i>"Saya juga merasa dihargai saat mereka melakukan hal serupa ketika saya merayakan"</i>	<i>"I also feel respected when they do the same for me during Islamic"</i>	Indicates that respect for religious differences is mutual and practiced in daily life, reinforcing that tolerance is

	<i>hari besar agama Islam, kak." [RMP, baris 82 – 84]</i>	<i>holidays." [RMP, Line 82 – 84]</i>	emotionally embedded and socially reciprocal.
3	<i>"Kalau teman saya merayakan Natal atau Nyepian, saya ucapkan selamat." [KR, baris 59 – 63]</i>	<i>"When my friends celebrate Christmas or Nyepi, I say happy holidays to them." [KR, Line 59 – 63]</i>	Shows that interfaith respect is enacted through simple but meaningful gestures like holiday greetings, reflecting active appreciation and habitual practice of tolerance.
4	<i>"Biasanya saya ucapin selamat kalau mereka merayakan sesuatu, kayak Natal atau Nyepi, kak." [BSA, baris 61 – 63]</i>	<i>"I usually say happy holidays when they celebrate something, like Christmas or Nyepi." [BSA, Line 61 – 63]</i>	Reflects how everyday interactions are shaped by learned respectful behavior, showing that tolerance is practiced regularly and informally, becoming part of one's social habitus.
5	<i>"Saya selalu mencoba untuk nggak membedakan teman berdasarkan agamanya, kak. Semua teman saya sama, nggak ada yang lebih atau kurang." [BSA, baris 160 – 161]</i>	<i>"I always try not to differentiate between my friends based on religion. To me, all of them are equal, no one is more or less than the other." [BSA, Line 160 – 161]</i>	Emphasizes the participant's internalized sense of equality and fairness across religious differences, reinforcing that inclusive social behavior is not conditional but consistent and normalized in daily social life.

Table 5. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Tolerance and Appreciation of Differences

This attitude strongly indicates that the values of religious moderation have been internalized within the adolescents. They do not perceive difference as a threat to identity or social stability, but rather as a social richness that deserves to be valued and preserved. Within the framework of positive psychology, this reflects a strengthening of healthy social character traits such as empathy, openness, and appreciation for diversity as sources of personal and social growth (Setiawati & Achadi, 2024).

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Kita nggak cuma melihat perbedaan, tapi juga melihat kesamaan yang bisa membuat kita hidup lebih harmonis, kak." [RMP, baris 170 – 172]</i>	<i>"We don't just focus on differences; we also look for similarities that can help us live more harmoniously." [RMP, Line 170 – 172]</i>	Reflects a perspective that embraces diversity as a form of social enrichment. By emphasizing shared values, the participant demonstrates internalization of religious moderation, seeing pluralism as a foundation for unity, not a threat to social identity.

Table 6. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Tolerance and Appreciation of Differences

These findings reinforce the argument of Supiah & Pudongge (2024), who emphasize that both formal and non – formal education, including religious instruction and social interaction within the family, play a significant role in shaping tolerance among adolescents. An environment that supports moderation and diversity provides space for adolescents to develop tolerance as an integral part of their social identity (Janah et al., 2024). Therefore, tolerance education must not be delivered only theoretically, but should be integrated into daily practice and established as a core value in social relationships (Purniati & Binawati, 2024).

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AS A RESPECTED PERSONAL RIGHT

Participants emphasized that every individual has the full right to choose, embrace, and practice a religion according to their personal beliefs. For them, religion is a deeply personal and spiritual matter that cannot be imposed by anyone, including parents or other family members. They demonstrated the courage to uphold this view, even when living in a social environment that often carries strong expectations of religious conformity. In the interviews, several participants expressed respect for friends who chose to convert to a different religion or who held different beliefs from their families, as they believed that everyone is entitled to their own spiritual freedom.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Agama adalah pilihan pribadi dan setiap orang berhak untuk memilih apa yang mereka yakini." [RMP, baris 45 – 46]	"Religion is a personal choice, and everyone has the right to believe in what they choose." [RMP, Line 45 – 46]	Demonstrates the participant's strong awareness of individual autonomy in matters of faith, reflecting an internalized belief that religious identity is a personal right that must be protected from external interference.
2	"Saya juga nggak ingin dipaksa untuk mengikuti agama orang lain." [RMP, baris 54 – 55]	"I also don't want to be forced to follow someone else's religion." [RMP, Line 54 – 55]	Expresses resistance to coercion in religious matters, reinforcing the idea that faith is a deeply personal matter. The statement affirms the participant's belief in the importance of freedom of belief and religious self – determination.
3	"Itu adalah pilihan pribadi mereka sih, kak. Setiap orang kan punya hak untuk memilih agama yang mereka yakini." [RMP, baris 122 – 123]	"That's their personal choice. Everyone has the right to choose the religion they believe in." [RMP, Line 122 – 123]	Reflects the participant's respect for religious autonomy, even in cases where someone chooses a different path from their family. This affirms a strong belief in individual spiritual freedom and a willingness to defend that principle against prevailing norms of conformity.

Table 7. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Religious Freedom as a Respected Personal Right

Religious freedom is viewed by the participants as a fundamental principle for building fair, healthy, and respectful social relationships within a diverse society (Mustafa & Khan). For them, religious coercion is not only a violation of individual rights but also a potential threat to interpersonal harmony and a source of unnecessary conflict. Therefore, they prefer to support each other's beliefs and maintain personal spiritual autonomy.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Kalau saya memaksa mereka mengikuti agama saya, itu seperti saya mengabaikan hak mereka sebagai individu juga, kak." [BSA, baris 55 – 57]	"If I force them to follow my religion, that means I'm ignoring their rights as individuals too." [BSA, Line 55 – 57]	The participant acknowledges that religious coercion violates personal autonomy. This shows a strong ethical stance in respecting others' freedom of belief, which is foundational for fair and respectful social

2	<i>"Kalau kita dipaksa untuk ikut agama orang lain, itu nggak adil."</i> [BSA, baris 123 – 124]	<i>"If we're forced to follow someone else's religion, that's unfair."</i> [BSA, Line 123 – 124]	relationships in a pluralistic setting. Highlights a clear rejection of coercion in matters of faith, affirming that justice in a diverse society must include the right to choose one's own religion freely. It underscores the participant's moral clarity regarding religious freedom and its importance for social harmony.
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Table 8. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Religious Freedom as a Respected Personal Right

This perspective reflects a strong understanding of human rights principles, particularly in the context of religious freedom. The participants did not merely perceive this freedom as a normative ideal but had internalized it as part of their everyday social ethics. This awareness indicates a level of cognitive maturity, empathy, and the capacity to accept diversity as an inevitable part of life that does not need to be controlled or suppressed.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Setiap orang punya pilihan sendiri untuk agama yang mereka pilih. Kalau mereka merasa itu yang terbaik untuk mereka, saya dukung aja."</i> [KR, baris 121 – 123]	<i>"Everyone has their own choice regarding the religion they follow. If they feel it's the best for them, I fully support it."</i> [KR, Line 121 – 123]	Indicates a strong endorsement of personal freedom in matters of faith. The participant not only accepts this right, but actively supports others' religious choices, showing that human rights values are not abstract, but embedded in their social behavior.
2	<i>"Semua orang harus bebas menjalankan agama mereka tanpa ada yang memaksa. Itu hak dasar setiap orang sih, kak."</i> [KR, baris 138 – 140]	<i>"Everyone should be free to practice their religion without being forced. That's a basic right."</i> [KR, Line 138 – 140]	Reflects an internalized belief in religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The use of the phrase "basic right" shows that the participant has adopted this value not only cognitively, but as a guiding principle in everyday ethical reasoning.

Table 9. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Religious Freedom as a Respected Personal Right

This finding is in line with Purba (2024), who stated that the protection of religious freedom is one of the essential pillars for maintaining social harmony in a pluralistic Indonesian society. When individuals are free to believe and practice their religion without fear or pressure, interfaith conflicts can be minimized, and relationships among groups can be built upon a foundation of mutual respect and justice. This further reinforces the urgency of integrating the value of religious freedom into character education and youth development across religious lines.

POSITIVE INTERFAITH SOCIAL INTERACTION

Interfaith interaction was carried out naturally by the participants, without any signs of awkwardness, restriction, or discrimination in their social relationships. The adolescents involved in this study demonstrated a high level of openness and flexibility in building communication and cooperation with peers from different religious backgrounds. Religious identity was not seen as a dividing factor that limited their social space; instead, it became part of the diversity that enriched interpersonal dynamics.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Jadi, kalau ketemu teman yang agamanya beda, ya biasa aja, saya lebih fokus ke pertemanan kami, bukan agamanya." [RMP, baris 26 – 28]	"When I meet friends with different religions, it feels normal, I focus more on our friendship, not their religion." [RMP, Line 26 – 28]	Shows that religious differences are not a social barrier. The participant prioritizes human connection over religious identity, reflecting openness and social maturity in navigating interfaith relationships.
2	"Kami tetap berinteraksi dengan baik, ngobrol biasa, dan saling mendukung." [RMP, baris 99 – 100]	"We still interact well, have normal conversations, and support each other." [RMP, Line 99 – 100]	Demonstrates that everyday interfaith interactions are natural and harmonious. It confirms that adolescents do not feel tension or distance when engaging with peers of different faiths, but instead maintain mutual support and cooperation.

Table 10. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Positive Interfaith Social Interaction

The participants expressed that they never felt the need to limit themselves or others in social interactions simply because of religious differences. On the contrary, they viewed such differences as opportunities to understand alternative perspectives, learn from diverse religious practices, and broaden their social experiences. Through these interactions, they fostered empathy, mutual support, and respect. The resulting social relationships were characterized by equality, participation, and inclusivity, reflecting healthy relational patterns in a pluralistic society.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Kadang mereka cerita tentang perayaan agama mereka, saya dengerin aja." [KR, baris 36 – 37]	"Sometimes they talk about their religious celebrations, and I just listen." [KR, Line 36 – 37]	Reflects an open and non-judgmental attitude. The participant shows interest and respect toward different religious expressions, fostering empathy and curiosity rather than distance or bias.
2	"Saya lebih suka menjaga hubungan baik dengan mereka." [KR, baris 53 – 54]	"I prefer to maintain good relationships with them." [KR, Line 53 – 54]	Indicates a relational priority on harmony and respect over doctrinal or religious difference, suggesting that inclusive interaction is a conscious social value.
3	"Yang penting kita bisa saling menghargai." [KR, baris 107]	"What matters is that we respect one another." [KR, Line 107]	Emphasizes mutual respect as the foundation of interfaith social relations, reinforcing equality and acceptance as core values in peer interactions.
4	"Saya selalu pastikan untuk nggak"	"I always make sure not to treat my friends"	Highlights a commitment to fairness and inclusivity. The

<i>membedakan teman."</i> [KR, baris 165]	<i>differently."</i> [KR, Line 165]	participant consciously avoids discrimination, demonstrating the internalization of inclusive principles in daily social practice.
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Table 11. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Positive Interfaith Social Interaction

This finding shows that religious identity does not serve as a rigid boundary in the process of social network formation among adolescents. Rather, religious diversity serves as the foundation for the growth of positive relationships rooted in universal values such as respect, mutual understanding, and solidarity (Simsek et al., 2022). The adolescents in this study demonstrated that harmonious social life is not only possible, but can thrive in a context where differences are consciously accepted.

Such openness and inclusivity are particularly important during adolescence, a developmental phase in which individuals are forming complex identities and social connections. From a positive psychology perspective, the ability to establish and maintain relationships across differences is an indicator of strong social – emotional well – being (Veesar et al., 2024). Adolescents who can interact well in diverse environments tend to exhibit higher levels of empathy, tolerance, and openness, which ultimately contribute to their personal happiness and community harmony (Vinayak & Judge, 2018).

In the context of Indonesia's multicultural society, the practice of interfaith social interaction is highly strategic for building grassroots social peace (Haq et al., 2023). Education, the family environment, and local communities that instill values of openness toward differences have proven to play a major role in shaping young people who are ready to become peaceful and constructive social agents (Nihayati, 2023). Therefore, this finding not only illustrates interpersonal tolerance but also reflects the broader potential for social transformation through the strengthening of healthy interfaith interaction among adolescents.

CULTURAL PARTICIPATION AND SYMPATHY TOWARD THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF OTHERS

This theme emerged uniquely from one participant who explicitly demonstrated active involvement in the religious celebrations of others. This involvement went beyond simply offering holiday greetings to friends of different faiths and included participation in interreligious cultural activities, such as taking part in the *ogoh-ogoh* festival before Nyepi, serving as a committee member in interfaith religious events, and expressing genuine curiosity about other religious traditions.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Saya sering ikut merayakan, seperti ketika ada teman saya yang merayakan Natal dan Nyepi, saya ikut mengucapkan selamat dan kadang saya menjadi panitia dalam acara tersebut."</i> [RMP, baris 36 – 39]	<i>"I often join in celebrations. For example, when my friends celebrate Christmas or Nyepi, I say happy holidays and sometimes even serve as a committee member for the event."</i> [RMP, Line 36 – 39]	Shows a shift from passive acknowledgment to active involvement in interfaith events. The participant engages not just as an observer but as a contributor, indicating emotional investment and social solidarity across religious boundaries.

2	<i>"Saya pasti mengucapkan selamat. Misalnya, kalau ada yang merayakan Natal, saya bilang 'Selamat Natal ya!' atau kalau ada yang merayakan Nyepi, saya juga mengucapkan selamat. Saya juga ikut acara ogoh-ogoh kemarin, kak. Saya rasa itu cara yang sederhana untuk menunjukkan rasa hormat terhadap tradisi mereka, kak."</i> [RMP, baris 68 – 73]	<i>"I always say happy holidays. For instance, if someone celebrates Christmas, I say 'Merry Christmas,' or if it's Nyepi, I do the same. I also joined the ogoh-ogoh event yesterday. I think it's a simple way to show respect for their traditions."</i> [RMP, Line 68 – 73]	Reflects sincere and voluntary participation in the cultural expressions of other faiths. This demonstrates not only curiosity but also a proactive gesture of interreligious appreciation and empathy, showing tolerance as both affective and participatory in nature.
3	<i>"Beberapa teman saya yang beragama berbeda juga ikut berdoa atau merayakan bersama dengan cara mereka sendiri."</i> [RMP, baris 84 – 86]	<i>"Some of my friends who follow different religions also join in prayer or celebration in their own ways."</i> [RMP, Line 84 – 86]	Indicates that such acts of cross – religious participation are reciprocal and socially accepted within the community. It highlights a shared culture of mutual respect and involvement that strengthens interfaith harmony without threatening individual religious identities.

Table 12. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Cultural Participation and Sympathy Toward the Religious Traditions of Others

This action reflects a form of tolerance that goes beyond reactive or socially polite behavior, reaching a deep affective and participatory level. The participant not only expressed verbal respect but also actively took part in interfaith celebrations with sincerity, without feeling threatened or losing their sense of identity.

Although this theme was identified from only one participant, it holds significant scholarly value. In qualitative research, especially within a phenomenological approach, the unique experience of a single individual can meaningfully enrich our understanding of the diverse spectrum of human experiences (Muhammad et al., 2023). Active involvement in interfaith religious activities serves as evidence that tolerance can evolve into active solidarity, where one not only accepts the existence of other religions but also joins in celebrating and respecting them without feeling that their own identity is threatened.

This phenomenon shows that the expression of tolerance need not remain at the cognitive or passive level, but can be realized through concrete, participatory social action. Such involvement opens up authentic spaces for encounter between adherents of different faiths, strengthens emotional bonds between individuals, and fosters a broader sense of shared belonging within a diverse society. It can also serve as an initial foundation for building strong social bridges in the pursuit of a peaceful multicultural community (Zulham & Lubis, 2022).

These findings align with the research of Grøtter et al. (2018), who emphasized that active engagement in the culture and traditions of other groups positively contributes to

the development of inclusive attitudes, intergroup empathy, and the capacity of adolescents to build healthy social relationships. In the framework of positive psychology, this kind of engagement also represents the actualization of social virtues such as compassion, openness, and respect for diversity.

Thus, although this theme emerged from a single individual, it reveals great potential to be developed further in character education and the cultivation of tolerance among adolescents. Such participatory interfaith involvement could serve as a model of transformative social practice that fosters more equal, warm, and ideologically liberating dialogue among religious communities.

COLLABORATION TOWARD COMMON GOALS AMID DIFFERENCES

All participants expressed that collaboration with individuals from different religious backgrounds occurred effectively and without significant obstacles. In their social interactions, whether in the context of school activities, group projects, or other social initiatives, religious identity was never used as the primary consideration. Instead, the emphasis was placed on achieving shared goals, fair division of tasks, and a strong spirit of cooperation. Their collaboration was built on mutual respect and trust, forming a solid foundation for cohesive and harmonious teamwork.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	"Meskipun kami berbeda agama, kami tetap bisa bekerja sama dengan baik, saling membantu, dan nggak ada masalah, kak." [RMP, baris 153 – 155]	"Even though we have different religions, we can still work well together, help each other, and there's no problem." [RMP, Line 153 – 155]	Emphasizes that religious differences do not interfere with teamwork. The participant highlights smooth and effective collaboration, grounded in mutual respect and a practical focus on common objectives rather than identity – based separation.
2	"Bahwa perbedaan agama itu bukanlah halangan untuk bergaul atau berkolaborasi, kak. Kami bisa fokus pada tujuan yang sama dan saling mendukung dalam mencapai tujuan kami itu, kak." [RMP, baris 161 – 164]	"Religious differences are not a barrier to getting along or collaborating. We can focus on shared goals and support each other to achieve them." [RMP, Line 161 – 164]	Reflects an inclusive and task – oriented mindset, where common goals outweigh religious distinctions. This suggests a mature approach to diversity, where interfaith collaboration is normalized and becomes a foundation for social cohesion and mutual success.

Table 13. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Collaboration Toward Common Goals Amid Differences

Participants believed that the success of their collaboration was determined by commitment to responsibility and open communication, rather than similarity in religious beliefs. In their experience, religious differences never interfered with the group's performance or became a source of conflict. On the contrary, in many cases, background diversity enriched the working process, as each individual brought unique perspectives and approaches to completing a task or achieving a common objective.

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
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1	<i>"Kami semua fokus pada tugas yang sama, jadi perbedaan agama bukan halangan untuk bekerja sama, kak."</i> [KR, baris 147 – 148]	<i>"We all focused on the same task, so religious differences weren't a barrier to working together."</i> [KR, Line 147 – 148]	Highlights that collaboration was driven by shared responsibilities and goals. The participant perceives religious identity as irrelevant in practical cooperation, emphasizing task – based unity over belief – based division.
2	<i>"Yaa, karena yang penting itu tujuan bersama."</i> [KR, baris 151]	<i>"Yeah, because what matters is the shared goal."</i> [KR, Line 151]	Reflects a mindset that prioritizes common objectives above individual backgrounds. It suggests that the participant values contribution and cooperation more than religious similarity in group settings.
3	<i>"Jadi agama nggak jadi masalah."</i> [KR, baris 152 – 153]	<i>"So religion wasn't an issue."</i> [KR, Line 152 – 153]	Clearly affirms that religious identity did not cause any difficulty or limitation in collaborative activities, reinforcing the idea that successful teamwork is based on mutual commitment and understanding, not religious homogeneity.
4	<i>"Kalau kita bekerja sama, kita jadi lebih bisa memahami satu sama lain."</i> [RMP, baris 169 – 170]	<i>"When we work together, we can understand each other better."</i> [RMP, Line 169 – 170]	Indicates that collaboration across religious lines fosters deeper mutual understanding. Diversity in the group becomes an asset for empathy, learning, and stronger social cohesion.
5	<i>"Bekerja sama ini juga bisa membuat kita lebih terbuka dan lebih mudah untuk menerima perbedaan, kak."</i> [RMP, baris 173 – 174]	<i>"Working together also helps us become more open and more accepting of differences."</i> [RMP, Line 173 – 174]	Reflects that interfaith collaboration enhances openness and tolerance. The experience of cooperating with others from different backgrounds strengthens psychological flexibility and reduces prejudice, turning diversity into a driver of inclusive attitudes and teamwork.

Table 14. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Collaboration Toward Common Goals Amid Differences

These findings demonstrate that the values of tolerance and pluralism are not confined to abstract ideals or moral concepts; rather, they have been concretely implemented in the social practices of these adolescents. The natural and productive interfaith collaboration reflects the successful internalization of religious moderation values in their everyday lives. In the context of positive psychology, experiences like these contribute to the development of social competencies such as empathy, effective communication, and the ability to build relationships across differences (Daheri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, this kind of collaborative practice is a reflection of character education that functions effectively, both through formal education in schools and through informal interactions in the community. When adolescents are accustomed to working with anyone, regardless of religious background, they develop mindsets and habits that are inclusive, fair, and appreciative of diversity (Qadir & Islam, 2023).

No	Participant Quote (Indonesia)	Participant Quote (English)	Interpretation
1	<i>"Karena yang penting itu kerjasamanya, kak, bukan agamanya, kak."</i> [BSA, baris 144 – 145]	<i>"What matters is the cooperation, not the religion."</i> [BSA, Line 144 – 145]	Highlights the participant's internalization of inclusive values, likely shaped through school and community interactions. It shows that character education has taught them to prioritize collective action and mutual respect over religious identity.
2	<i>"Selama kita punya tujuan yang sama, kita bisa capai bersama."</i> [BSA, baris 145 – 146]	<i>"As long as we have the same goal, we can achieve it together."</i> [BSA, Line 145 – 146]	Reinforces the idea that shared purpose transcends differences. This mindset is indicative of effective character – building processes that emphasize unity, collaboration, and goal orientation regardless of religious background.

Table 15. Interview Excerpts and Interpretations - Collaboration Toward Common Goals Amid Differences

These findings highlight the urgency of integrating collaborative values across differences into educational curricula and extracurricular activities. Interfaith and cross – identity collaboration like this is a crucial pillar in shaping young generations who are not only tolerant in ideology but also adaptive, communicative, and capable of resolving conflicts peacefully. In the long term, such collaborative experiences can serve as essential preparation for adolescents to live and contribute actively in a pluralistic and democratic society.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that adolescents in Kalurahan Watusigar have internalized and actively practiced the values of religious tolerance in their everyday lives. Within a pluralistic social environment, they not only accept religious diversity as a normative reality but perceive it as a source of enrichment that enhances social interaction and broadens individual perspectives. Rather than viewing religion as a boundary, they regard it as an integral part of personal identity that contributes to social harmony.

Their tolerant attitudes are reflected in six major themes: (1) diversity as a lived social reality, (2) tolerance and appreciation of differences as core values, (3) religious freedom as a respected personal right, (4) positive interfaith social interaction, (5) cultural participation and sympathy toward other religious traditions, and (6) collaboration toward common goals amid differences. While the fifth theme emerged from a single participant, it offers significant insight into the affective and participatory dimensions of tolerance, highlighting a deeper level of interreligious engagement.

The novelty of this study lies in its phenomenological portrayal of religious tolerance not as an abstract or institutional ideal, but as a lived, emotional, and relational practice that emerges organically within a rural, pluralistic context. In contrast to prior research focusing on urban youth or formal education, this study reveals how internal factors (such as empathy, openness, and personal moral reasoning) and external influences (such as family values, community norms, and interfaith socialization) shape adolescents' development of tolerant attitudes and behaviors.

These findings affirm that adolescent tolerance is not merely passive or conformist, but an active, embodied, and transformative form of social behavior. Their openness, empathy, and respect for religious freedom not only foster harmony at the community level but also reflect the broader potential of Indonesia's younger generation to build a more inclusive, peaceful, and democratic society.

However, this study is limited by its small sample size and localized context, which may not fully represent the broader diversity of adolescent experiences in Indonesia. Future research is encouraged to involve more varied participants across different regions and cultural backgrounds to deepen the understanding of youth tolerance in plural societies.

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