

# The role of religious and cultural education as a resolution of radicalism conflict in Sibolga community

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This study aimed to investigate the role of religious and cultural education in solving radicalism conflicts that occurred in the Sibolga community in Indonesia. The method used in this research was qualitative with the type of grounded research. This study involved educational stakeholders and traditional as well as cultural leaders as informants in collecting data. These informants were chosen by using a purposive sampling technique. The data obtained in this study were qualitative data that were analysed descriptively by applying the data triangulation technique. This study's results indicated that two elements were used as steps to resolve the radicalism conflict that occurred in the Sibolga community in Indonesia. The two elements were educational elements and cultural elements. The educational element played a role in building the students' character and creating tolerance among religious communities to maintain unity and integrity among citizens. Cultural elements acted as controllers of differences in society with all customs that were binding in society.

**Contribution:** This article contributes to the completion of solutions for the many perpetrators of religious radicalism involving students. The role of religious and cultural education as a resolution of radicalism conflicts. In fact, the conflict resolution steps taken through these two elements had been successfully implemented in the Sibolga community, Indonesia, as one of the areas affected by radicalism.

**Keywords:** culture; religious education; radicalism; conflict resolution; students' character; religious tolerance; unity and integrity among citizens.

## Introduction

Diversity is natural in society and the state, particularly in Indonesia (Tjarsono 2013). Of course, this will be a great potential if it can be managed wisely. In contrast, if it is not managed correctly, this potential will be a conflict in society. This diversity will positively and negatively impact running the state system (Alesina, Gennaioli & Lovo 2019). On the other hand, diversity can be used as a medium to increase individual nationalism (Muntaha & Wekke 2017). Moreover, diversity also tends to create social conflict (Wolf & Perron 2014). Therefore, appreciation towards differences and high tolerance will be able to form unity and integrity in the midst of existing differences (Ubaedillah & Rozak 2016).

There were many types of social conflicts happening in Indonesia that were caused by intolerance towards existing diversity (Maddison & Diprose 2018), including conflicts that occurred in Poso, which occurred from 1998 to 2001 with the background of religious differences issues (Ali, Khairil & Fahry 2020; Schulze 2019). The conflict in Poso would not occur if every community had a tolerant attitude and respected every difference. It would be more useful if these differences were used as a potential that could be managed to get something more positive later. This follows Sudarto's opinion (2018), saying that diversity is a potential that must be strengthened by good governance to positively impact society and the country. Furthermore, Satrio (2019) states that religious diversity in Indonesia often has an impact on conflicts, but in other contexts, diversity in the religious context can strengthen brotherly relations because each individual can get to know each other through the differences.

Conflict is one of the most avoided things for everyone who wants peace. However, in reality, conflict cannot be avoided in society (Nordås & Gleditsch 2015). Conflict usually occurs when there is a gap between ideal conditions and reality. Every community has experienced

conflicts when dealing with its life system, but what distinguishes is the quantity and impact of these conflicts (Jehn & Mannix 2001). Conflicts happen through social, political, economic, cultural and religious factors (Habib 2004). Of all the various factors, the religious factor is one of the most sensitive factors causing conflicts (Yunus 2014).

Sibolga community is one of Indonesia's cities with an almost equal number of Muslim and non-Muslim residents. Interestingly, Sibolga has been considered one of the areas with little social conflict, especially with low religious background (Nuryani & Taufiq 2019). This is because of the role of all societal elements, which work together to build tolerance between people. However, the entire public was shocked by the suicide bombing that occurred in the city of Sibolga in March 2019. This shows that although efforts to reduce conflict have been carried out regularly when these efforts have gaps, they will be easy to destroy (Boulton 2011).

The explosion in Sibolga was said to be one of the radicalism impacts that caused a gap in the city. Radicalism had infiltrated the city, which has been considered safe and peaceful from the issue of social conflict. Radicalism can slowly get into the city through elements of society, for example, schools (Munip 2012) and social interactions with migrants (Asrori 2015). This incident is a reminder that every element of society must cooperate to minimise conflict and reject radicalism in the community. This is in line with what Cross and Snow (2011) state that radicalism can exist through many causes and people are not aware of it, but cooperation from all elements of society will significantly help in preventing the existence of radicalism in the community.

To prevent the conflict, Ali et al. (2020) state that community cooperation in preventing radicalism is part of conflict resolution caused by radicalism. This is in accordance with the opinion stating that the cooperation formed by various elements of society will be a resolution of conflicts that occur (Deutsch, Coleman & Marcus 2006). The efforts of the whole community in finding solutions to the conflicts that occur are a form of concern and a high sense of belonging to the environment they occupy (Alexandra 2018). As a result of finding the conflict resolution, the community will be wiser in preparing before conflicts arise, dealing with when conflicts occur and maintaining the peace that has been achieved in the community.

Society, education, religion and culture are three very close environments that cannot even be separated from society (Saihu 2019). Education can shape each individual attitude (Lubis & Wangid 2019). Then, forming a good attitude will fortify the individual from radicalism, which tends to be intolerant and wants damage (Perrow 2008). Furthermore, religion is often used as a scapegoat for the existence of

radicalism (Fealy 2004). However, Amin (2017) stated that religion would actually become potentially effective in blocking radicalism in society if it is actualised properly and in line with the procedures of religious teachings. In addition to education and religion, culture also has a positive role in preventing the issue of radicalism in society (Satriawan, Islami & Lailam 2019).

There were some studies that discussed various ways to prevent the spread of radicalism in society. These studies tended to investigate two elements, namely educational elements such as research conducted by Sary (2017), which reveals that the realm of education through the learning process in schools plays a role in preventing radicalism through the process of forming children's attitudes and character as well as building a sense of tolerance towards existing differences in the community. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by Hadi Kuntjara (2019) related to religious education, as well as fostering unity and harmony among fellow citizens in preventing acts of terrorism. In addition, the cultural realm can also play a role in preventing radicalism; this is evidenced by research conducted by Arifinsyah, Andy and Damanik (2020), which reveals that radicalism can be prevented by a cultural approach embedded in the community. This research tried to combine the roles of education and culture in an effort to prevent the spread of radicalism in Indonesian society.

This research will contribute to offering a solution that can be taken by the government and the Indonesian people on how to deal with and prevent the emergence of intolerant attitudes in society that lead to the emergence of radicalism cases. Therefore, it is important to examine more deeply the influence of educational and cultural elements in dealing with and preventing the emergence of cases of radicalism in Indonesia. The next section of this article will discuss the methods of conducting this research including design, subject, research procedures, data collection techniques and data analysis techniques.

## Method

This research applied a qualitative approach with the type of grounded research. This research was conducted in the Sibolga Community Indonesia. Sibolga is one of the cities that became a victim of radicalism in Indonesia, with a suicide bombing case in March 2019. Sibolga is also a city that has ethnic and religious diversity, so Sibolga is regarded as one of the cities that is suitable to be investigated as an example of the application of the principle of Unity and Diversity in Indonesia. Not without reason, history recorded that since Sibolga was founded, this city had been called a city that is tolerant of differences in its community, as evidenced by the lives of people who live side by side harmoniously in these differences.

The research informants were two educational figures, which is a representative of the association of religious education

teachers in Sibolga, two traditional or cultural figures that appointed from the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Organization and one government figure. This research was conducted in August, 4 months after the suicide bombing in March 2019. Educational figures were essential to be involved in this study to obtain data related to the role of religious education in building tolerance in the school environment. Therefore, the educational figures involved were teachers who taught religious education. Meanwhile, involving traditional or cultural leaders was also essential to obtain data on the role of customs or culture applied in Sibolga to reduce cases of radicalism in the city. Apart from educational and traditional leaders, the government was also involved in this study to review and confirm the research data's validity in their respective fields. Data from educational figures would reveal several aspects, namely aspects of the curriculum, the learning process and the applied evaluation stage adopted from the published book by the Directorate General of Islamic Education Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia about the integration of religious moderation in Islamic religious education subjects, which discusses managing the interaction of school members without discrimination, managing learning that promotes the values of tolerance, respect for differences, strengthening a peaceful school atmosphere, managing student activities that encourage positive and active interactions to build respect, mutual respect, being moderate, preventing misunderstandings terrorist extremism and creating a harmonious school atmosphere (Muhtarom, Marbawi & Najib 2021).

Meanwhile, data from traditional or cultural leaders would reveal aspects of community habits in the Sibolga area and evaluate the implementation of customs or culture that have been prevailing in the city so far. Furthermore, data from government figures would answer aspects of the policies taken by the city administration in dealing with the problem of radicalism. These informants were selected using the purposive sampling technique.

There were several steps passed in accomplishing the study:

- conducting a preliminary study to obtain preliminary research data
- collecting data from informants for research data needs,
- analysing the data obtained
- drawing a conclusion from the research.

Data collection techniques used in this study were interview and observation techniques. The interview used was a structured interview, while the observation used was systematic observation. The data obtained in this study were qualitative data, which were then analysed by data triangulation techniques (Miles 1994), namely through the process of

- research data collection,
- data sorting or reduction,
- presentation of reduction result data and
- drawing conclusions.

Finally, the data obtained from the interviews were further confirmed by data obtained from observations. If the data

were synchronous, a conclusion could be drawn from the research data obtained.

## Research findings and discussion

### Sociodemography of Sibolga community, Indonesia on religious and cultural

Sibolga City is one of the developing cities in the southern area of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. The population of this city is around 87 286 people of various ethnic and religious backgrounds (Government of Sibolga City 2019–2021). The diversity in the community makes it appropriate to become one of the samples for implementing the principle of Unity in Diversity in Indonesia, especially in the province of North Sumatra. Since the city was established, there has never been a case of radicalism caused by intolerance in the area. However, the entire community was shocked by an incident in March 2019, which was an explosion in the city that claimed the lives of civilians. The explosion not only caused casualties but also resulted in trauma or psychological burdens for the community who got the impact directly. People's anxiety or trauma would have an impact on weakening their cognitive abilities (Kreitler & Kreitler 1988). In the end, there is great concern that this would result in the instability of the city system. Therefore, all elements of society played roles in overcoming these problems.

The results showed that Sibolga was one of the cities that became victims of the bomb terror with a fast recovery. It only takes a few days to return to normal activities again, and it only takes about 2 to 3 months to get rid of the community's trauma about the suicide bombing that happened there. The city government had several ways to overcome the problem of radicalism cases that occurred in March 2019. Important elements in society were reinforced to work together in overcoming these problems. The elements involved were educational figures, cultural figures and of course, the government itself as policymakers in the city. This was because these elements had the most influence on maintaining communal harmony. All of these elements were embraced, and they carried out their respective roles to prevent the re-emergence of radicalism in the city. The result was that the people could quickly recover from the trauma of the bomb terror that occurred in March 2019.

The educational aspects focus on religious education, which includes formal, informal and non-formal education. In formal education, the first effort made is to distance all students from radicalism and form a tolerant attitude. Education is an essential element that can form each individual's knowledge, attitudes and skills (Asnah 2017). Then, religious education is considered to have the most impact on preventing radicalism because religious education tends to focus on shaping attitudes or morals through the applied religious education curriculum (Azis et al. 2021). Information obtained from educational stakeholders stated that the role of education in overcoming and responding to cases of radicalism that occurred in Sibolga was to strengthen

the formation of attitudes or morals of students to respect each other's life rights and respect every difference in the community:

... The school focuses on the role of religious education. It is because the religious education curriculum not only teaches the relationship between individuals and their God, but it also tends to shape students' morals and builds tolerance among others. (MSF, pers. comm., 02 December 2019)

Apart from formal education, the implementation of religious education also involves informal and non-formal education to form tolerance between communities and create harmony. Based on information obtained from education stakeholders in the city, assistance to strengthen students' character takes place starting from family education, community and formal schools:

Not only was education in schools involved, but also non-formal educational setting. Even, family education was also involved. It is hoped that there would be a strong tolerance for every student and of course there will be no more intolerance or radicalism. (ALB, pers. comm., 02 December 2019)

The role of education is considered necessary with the target of school-age individuals as the next generation in the city. The informant said that the government was targeting these students as a long-term regeneration investment for the city. Therefore, their character or personality had to be built and accompanied continuously so that these future generations would avoid intolerance that leads to radicalism. Family education is also seen as necessary to be involved in overcoming the spread of radicalism. According to the information obtained, the informant stated that parents took an active role in carrying out the intended family education process. This would facilitate efforts to prevent radicalism issues in the city.

In addition to the family education, community non-formal education was also involved in efforts to prevent the spread of radicalism in Sibolga. The non-formal education could be in the form of tutoring or learning centres such as *Madrasah Diniyah Awaliyah* (MDA) (Islamic primary schools). Based on information obtained from informants, non-formal education was not targeted directly to shape students' attitudes, but they still have a role in preventing radicalism. This education could balance and deepen the understanding of the material from the formal school setting. Then, students who learn and study outside formal schools would get more productive activities to reduce their chances of being contaminated by radicalism in society. This is confirmed by the result of the observation, which showed that students prioritised taking non-formal learning as a complement to the material and deepened the material obtained at school:

Community non-formal education and family education is clearly very helpful to educate children at school. It means strengthening their understanding, especially in terms of moral, because it is very important to build tolerance for children. (MSF, pers. comm., 02 December 2019)

The third aspect of education that played a role in preventing the spread of radicalism in Sibolga was formal education in

schools. Information obtained from educational stakeholders showed that schools as formal education centres for students are responsible for strengthening their character building in the education programme, which the Indonesian government launched. This programme had been already running before the suicide bombing occurred in March 2019 in Sibolga; however, this programme was made more intensive and consistent after the suicide bombing. This aimed to provide students with mutual respect and respect as fellow human beings, especially as fellow children of the nation. Therefore, the future generations of the city will later become the next generation who are against intolerance.

Religious education is one of the elements used by the city government as a medium in solving problems of radicalism in Sibolga city. Based on information obtained from government figures as informants in this study, it was stated that as there was a suicide bombing in March 2019, the government has immediately reinforced educational, religious and traditional leaders to work together to overcome this problem. There were several steps used in overcoming this problem; these steps were to spread religious education through preaching, such as sermons, recitation and counselling. The spread of *da'wah* [preaching] that emphasises tolerance among religious communities:

Of course, we don't want that radicalism to exist in this city, so the city government makes every effort to prevent it, one of which is to instill tolerance through religious education, formal schools, lectures, speech and others, and that is applied to all religions. So, to make it successful, elements of society must be involved and cooperate well. (IFI, pers. comm., 05 December 2019)

All religions applied for this programme in the city with adjustments to the religious context. These programmes aimed to prevent people's radicalism understanding and to treat community trauma from the cases that occurred in the city. The informant also stated that the government considered that delivering speech was an effective type of *da'wah* to be used to disseminate anti-radicalism understanding. The speech programme was applied by all religions there. The government was working with religious leaders to determine the material presented in the speech during the first 3 months after the suicide bombing, which was material about religious tolerance and the spread of facts about the cases that had occurred. One fact being questioned was that the suicide bombers were not residents of Sibolga city but residents of Lampung province who were visiting their relatives in Sibolga. In addition, the speech material on the importance of maintaining brotherly relations between the nation's children was also included in the material presented in the speech. This aimed to strengthen the people's unity and avoid trauma after the suicide bombing. Apart from being disseminated through the speech method, these materials were also disseminated through the recitation method:

We communicate the speech material to all religious leaders in order to focus on tolerance towards differences and dissemination of facts about the suicide bombing so that the public knows the

real facts. It is because the bomber was not from Sibolga. (IFI, pers. comm., 05 December 2019)

The routine recitation held every week was also one of the non-formal religious education programmes carried out by the people, especially Muslims. This recitation was held one to two times a week, and it was one of the programmes implemented to emphasise the spread of religious education to avoid intolerance among the community. According to the informant, the involvement of routine recitation during the time was seen as a potential that could be used to help people from the trauma of the suicide bombing that occurred in March 2019. The government and religious leaders were working together to recover the city condition and prevent the radicalism issues in the city:

In addition to the religious speech, we also optimize the community's weekly routine recitation. This is a potential that we can use to recover people's psychological disorders as well as provide the true understanding toward community tolerance. (IFI, pers. comm., 05 December 2019)

The method used was almost the same as the speech method, namely by discussing materials on inter-religious tolerance but with a different approach. The approach used in the recitation tended to be a more simple approach but still could build the meaning of diversity between religious communities. This is in line with Rozi's (2019) finding, which states that religious recitation can effectively become efforts to prevent radicalism. This information was confirmed by data obtained from observations, which indicated that routine recitation took place one to two times a week by focusing on diversity material among religious communities.

Apart from implementing speech and recitations, the government also involved educational stakeholders to conduct counselling to the community. This aimed to embrace the community to remain optimistic and to recover quickly from the traumatic cases that occurred there. Information obtained from informants revealed that the counselling activity was warmly welcomed by the community who really wanted to get rid of their trauma. Furthermore, this activity also aimed to foster public awareness to continue to maintain mutual friendship and pay attention to the environment around them. This was because the cases that occurred were not realised by the community and the bombers were not the original inhabitants of Sibolga city.

Customary or cultural figures also had a role in overcoming the radicalism problem that occurred in Sibolga. It is a city in the province of North Sumatra, Indonesia. As part of the province of North Sumatra, which is located in the southern part, Sibolga continues to prioritise the term *Dalihan Na Tolu*. The term is a cultural heritage of North Sumatra, which is located in the southern part. The term *Dalihan Na Tolu* emphasises unity or brotherhood through kinship:

*Dalihan Na Tolu* has become a culture that cannot be separated here. We always protect this culture in the community. *Dalihan Na Tolu* creates harmony in society because it has kinship principles. (RH, pers. comm., 06 December 2019)

The culture of *Dalihan Na Tolu* is aimed to strengthen brotherly relations among fellow citizens, respect each other and help each other in dealing with problems in the community. Traditional leaders take a role at the forefront in terms of leading the strengthening of *Dalihan Na Tolu* culture in Sibolga. Based on information obtained from informants, the government involved almost all traditional leaders in each area in the city to work together in assisting and improving relations between communities through strengthening the *Dalihan Na Tolu* culture.

### The role of educational elements as a resolution of radicalism

Education has a role in overcoming the issue of radicalism in Sibolga City. The results of the study show that the educational domains involved cover aspects of formal, informal and non-formal education. This is in accordance with the opinion of Izzah (2018), which states that all aspects of education have a very large role in creating a safe and peaceful society. Of course, the formal education involved is public or private schools, which have an educational curriculum that has been systematically arranged according to standards set by the Directorate General of Islamic Education Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia about the Integration of Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education Subjects who said that the need for a religious education based on the values of religious moderation through a school-based approach to the subject matter. The policy includes matters related to managing the interaction of all school members without discrimination, managing learning that promotes values of tolerance and respect for differences, strengthening a peaceful school atmosphere, strengthening habituation, managing student activities that encourage positive and active interactions to build respect, respect each other, be moderate, prevent terrorist extremism and create a harmonious school atmosphere.

The role of formal education has a significant impact on the formation of attitudes, knowledge and skills for each individual (Darmadi 2015). More specifically, the emphasis on this aspect of formal education in tackling the spread of radicalism in Sibolga city is the study of religious education. Through learning religious education, each individual is given an understanding of how important it is to maintain harmony and foster an attitude of tolerance. This is in accordance with the findings of Hussin (2005), which states that one of the things that is emphasised in learning religious education is cultivating a good attitude in each individual so that with that attitude, he can create harmony in society. Tolerance towards differences will prevent the emergence of radicalism in society (Asrori 2015). Furthermore, the motto of the Indonesian state, which reads *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* [Unity in Diversity], also emphasises that tolerance for differences is a way of uniting the Indonesian people (Nugroho 2018).

Apart from involving aspects of formal education, tackling radicalism in Sibolga city is also carried out by involving

aspects of informal education, namely education in the family. In this case, the family's role is to optimise the role of parents in educating their children in the family to ensure that the younger generation in the Sibolga city community has a good attitude or character. This is in accordance with the findings of Dasopang and Lubis (2021), which state that parents play an important role in shaping and maintaining children's attitudes. Furthermore, Runner and DeCelles (2002) state that example from parents to their children will facilitate the formation of a child's personality.

In fact, non-formal education is also involved in preventing the emergence of radicalism in the Sibolga city community. Still within the scope of the emphasis on forming an attitude of tolerance towards differences, the Sibolga city government utilises non-formal education institutions to instill the formation of an attitude of tolerance to its students. One of the non-formal educational institutions involved is MDA. The MDA school is a non-formal educational institution that uses a religious education curriculum and character education for students (Syahr 2016).

### **The role of cultural elements as a resolution of radicalism**

The role of culture cannot be separated from efforts to prevent the spread of radicalism in the Sibolga city community. As one of the areas located in the province of North Sumatra – Indonesia, the Sibolga city also has a very strong culture, which is also used as a unifying medium for society. This culture is called *Dalihan Na Tolu*. This culture is a culture that has been passed down from generation to generation among the people of Sibolga city. The concept of *Dalihan Na Tolu* has the principle of lineage or kinship (Armawi 2008). This is in accordance with the findings of Hilda (2016), which states that the concept of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which is used as one of the cultural heritages in North Sumatra, can form emotional relationships in the community so that it will minimise conflict in the community. Through the concept of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, a person can determine how he behaves and positions himself in society (Lubis, Joebagio & Pelu 2019).

Through the cultural concept in the form of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, the Sibolga city government hopes that all people will have a strong sense of brotherhood and kinship so that they can move together to protect each other's safety and environmental comfort. The growing sense of ownership of shared interests is something that can create a strong partnership in achieving the targets to be achieved (Wekke 2016). Furthermore, Slavin (2015) explains that cooperation in groups means that the group has the same interests and that will make it easier to achieve the expected results. Lubis' research (2019) states in its findings that the results obtained by working together will be more effective than working individually.

### **Conclusion**

Pluralism and diversity of religions and cultures can encourage all citizens to always preserve and instill the values of religious

moderation in maintaining harmony between religious communities in the country. Given this plurality and diversity, on the one hand, it can be a problem or a threat to the harmony of inter-religious life in Indonesia. In order to maintain and preserve harmony in society and avoid divisions based on religious differences, the community needs to uphold religious and cultural values in living the life of the nation and state, as has been implemented by educational figures, cultural figures and the city government of Sibolga.

Sibolga city had its way to overcome the radicalism conflict that occurred in March 2019, namely through elements of education and cultural elements. The educational element played a role in building the students' character and creating tolerance among religious communities to maintain unity and integrity among citizens. Cultural elements acted as controllers of differences in society with all customs that were binding in society. The collaboration of all elements had made the people to recover quickly from the trauma of the suicide bombing that occurred; the community also cared more about each other and was careful about radicalism.

This research was only at the stage of deepening the ways to solve the problem of radicalism in Sibolga, Indonesia, through the role of religious and cultural education. This research can be developed in the future by testing through experimental research about the significance of the influence of each of these elements so that the influence of each element can be found on solving the problem of radicalism in Indonesia.

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### **Competing interests**

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

### **Authors' contributions**

All authors contributed equally to this article.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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