Multiculturalism of Indonesia's Multireligious Communities: The Portrayal of Multicultural Competence and its Contributing Factors

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Abstract

Multireligious communities need to acquire multicultural competence (MC) to help them deal with complex interactions taking place in the repertoire of religious and cultural differences. Hence, this explanatory mixed-method study sought to quantitatively measure the MC of Indonesia's multireligious communities and to qualitatively explore the factors contributing to the formation of their MC. A quantitative survey with 30-item valid and reliable questionnaires was conducted to measure the MC of 577 respondents from a population of Indonesia's multireligious communities by using a convenient sampling technique. A descriptive qualitative study was further executed to explore the contributing factors of MC by involving 20 participants recruited using a purposive sampling technique. The data were analysed using descriptive-quantitative and interactive-model techniques. The quantitative data revealed that the multireligious communities had a high level of MC (M=3.64) demonstrated by high levels of multicultural awareness, skills, and knowledge with a balanced composition. The qualitative data highlighted five factors shaping their MC. These factors entailed mutual respect, tolerance, internalization of multicultural attitudes, good communication, and interactions with cultural traditions. Further studies could use these factors to develop multicultural education programs or interventions.

Keywords

Multiculturalism, multicultural competence, multireligious communities

Multiculturalismo de las Comunidades Multirreligiosas de Indonesia: La Representación de la Competencia Multicultural y sus Factores Contribuyentes

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Resumen

Las comunidades multirreligiosas necesitan adquirir competencia multicultural (MC) para ayudarlas a enfrentar interacciones complejas que ocurren en el repertorio de diferencias religiosas y culturales. Por lo tanto, este estudio explicativo de método mixto buscó medir cuantitativamente la MC de las comunidades multirreligiosas de Indonesia y explorar cualitativamente los factores que contribuyen a la formación de su MC. Se realizó una encuesta cuantitativa con cuestionarios válidos y confiables de 30 ítems para medir la MC de 577 encuestados de una población de comunidades multirreligiosas de Indonesia mediante una técnica de muestreo conveniente. Se llevó a cabo un estudio cualitativo descriptivo adicional para explorar los factores que contribuyen a la MC, involucrando a 20 participantes reclutados mediante una técnica de muestreo intencional. Los datos fueron analizados utilizando técnicas descriptivas-cuantitativas e interactivas. Los datos cuantitativos revelaron que las comunidades multirreligiosas tenían un alto nivel de MC (M=3,64), demostrado por altos niveles de conciencia, habilidades y conocimientos multiculturales con una composición equilibrada. Los datos cuantitativos destacaron cinco factores que dan forma a su MC. Estos factores implicaron el respeto mutuo, la tolerancia, la internalización de actitudes multiculturales, una buena comunicación e interacciones con tradiciones culturales. Estudios posteriores podrían utilizar estos factores para desarrollar programas o intervenciones de educación multicultural.

Palabras clave

Multiculturalismo, competencia multicultural, comunidades multirreligiosas

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S tudies on multi-religion is crucial for promoting tolerance, coexistence, and freedom (Hassanpour et al., 2022). In Indonesia, society adheres to various religions, including Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Despite efforts to maintain religious harmony in Indonesia, conflicts among different religions still occur. These conflicts are often mobilised by politicians who use religions as tools to gain power and win votes, leading to polarisation (Azizah et al., 2021). Additionally, Indonesia faces various multicultural issues. Religious conflicts can arise due to differences in beliefs (Nasir, 2020). Social inequality persists across economics, education, and resources (Idzalika & Lo Bue, 2020). Discrimination against specific ethnic groups, as well as issues concerning minority rights, such as those of the LGBT community, can further contribute to societal tensions (Wijaya, 2020). The government is continuously working towards policies that promote pluralism, tolerance, and social justice.

Talking about the phenomenon of multireligious conflicts among multicultural people, it is scientifically indicated that developing multicultural competence (MC) can be an effective solution to address these conflicts (McKinley et al., 2019). MC is recommended in this regard because religion itself conceptually falls into the realm of cultural theory, thus the concept of multi-religion has a strong association with multiculturalism (Taghavi & Segalla, 2023). MC is the ability of an individual or group to appreciate, understand, and promote diverse cultures, religions, and values within society (Portera, 2020). By developing this ability, individuals or groups will be better able to manage differences and build harmonious cooperation among groups in society.

Over the past five years, extensive research has addressed MC. Lantz et al. (2020) in the field of counselling highlighted MC's connection to the social dominance theory, emphasizing the importance of understanding this theory for effective interaction across diverse backgrounds. Consequently, education and MC training for clinic-psychological trainees should incorporate social dominance theory to advance social justice and equality. Specifically, the foregoing study contributes to the extent of understanding that to make MC training successful, student trainees should be supported by an ideal multicultural environment alongside sufficient multicultural knowledge and awareness of privilege. Shim (2021) conducted autoethnographic research, shedding light on challenges and opportunities in teaching science within multicultural contexts. The study underscored the need for science teachers to balance curriculum demands with students' diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences. Shim also stressed the significance of fostering MC among science educators, emphasizing an understanding and appreciation of students' diverse perspectives. By integrating the multiracial feminist theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderlands theory, the preceding study contributes to providing a robust framework for analysing the multicultural experiences of an educator.

Another study conducted by O'Hara et al. (2021) demonstrated the crucial role of MC in producing relevant and applicable counselling research, advocating for its integration in research and its consideration in counselling practice, accounting for clients' cultural diversity. The primary contribution of the foregoing research is to educate and provide guidance to counselling researchers, enabling them to become more attuned to multicultural issues within their research and enhance the quality of culturally relevant research. Additionally, Harris et al. (2019) explored the evaluation of students' MC in study abroad programs, highlighting the

importance of assessing the impact of such programs on students' knowledge and awareness of different cultures. Their findings revealed a significant increase in cultural knowledge and awareness among program participants, underlining the significance of evaluating MC in study abroad initiatives. This research contributes to providing valuable insights into designing more effective study abroad programs for promoting intercultural understanding and competence among students.

The above studies illustrate that MC plays a crucial role in advancing social justice and equality in intercultural relationships. These studies provide valuable knowledge on the need for developing MC in various contexts, such as counselling, science education, and study abroad programs, alongside effective strategies to do so. However, there is still a lack of research that focuses on MC in the context of multireligious communities. Hence, the present study aims to fill this gap by conducting mixed-method research to measure the MC of Indonesia's multireligious communities and to explore the factors that support their MC. This study is guided by two research questions: 1) How is the MC of Indonesia's multireligious communities? 2) What are the factors contributing to shaping the MC of Indonesia's multireligious communities? This study contributes to the understanding of the importance of MC in promoting religious tolerance, social harmony, and equality in diverse societies, including multireligious communities.

Literature Review

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a concept that values the cultural diversity and strength of every group within a society (Singh et al., 2020). It celebrates and respects the coexistence of various cultural, ethnic, and religious groups within a society, recognizing the unique contributions and perspectives each group brings to enrich the social fabric of that society (Berry & Hou, 2021). This concept highlights the importance of acknowledging and valuing diversity as a means of achieving social integration and prosperity. Modood (2021) identifies two dimensions of multiculturalism: the preservation of diverse cultures and the promotion of social connections between them. Although multiculturalism has received criticism, it remains an important means of advancing social justice and equality in intercultural relationships (Kymlicka, 2020). Reviewed from the works published by Elias and Mansouri (2020), multiculturalism is identical to several indicators which subsume openness, cultural diversity, inclusivity, recognition and respect for differences, the implementation of multicultural education, the habituation of intercultural dialogues, and the enactment of policies and laws supporting multiculturalism.

Multicultural Competence

MC refers to the abilities of individuals to understand, appreciate, and interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds (Swartz et al., 2020). This includes understanding cultural differences, improving communication skills, resolving conflicts, and creating

inclusive and diverse environments (Shliakhovchuk, 2021). MC is usually measured based on three dimensions: multicultural awareness, multicultural skills, and multicultural knowledge (Presseau et al., 2019). First, multicultural awareness refers to an individual's consciousness of cultural differences and diversity within society. This includes comprehending and acknowledging that other cultures have distinct values, norms, and customs from one's own culture. Multicultural awareness also involves the ability to place oneself in others' perspectives and recognize the impact of one's own culture on perception and behaviour (Presseau et al., 2019). Second, multicultural skills denote the ability to interact effectively with people from diverse cultures (Presseau et al., 2019). This involves proficient communication, establishing interpersonal relationships, and resolving conflicts in a multicultural context (Warsah, Morganna, et al., 2021). Multicultural skills require the capacity to recognize and navigate cultural differences and to comprehend and appreciate others' perspectives (Hamengkubuwono et al., 2022). Third, multicultural knowledge represents an understanding of cultures and diversity within society. This includes comprehension of the history, values, norms, and customs of different cultures. Multicultural knowledge can also encompass knowledge of social, economic, political, and environmental disparities that influence culture and diversity within society (Presseau et al., 2019). This knowledge is critical for fostering effective multicultural awareness and skills.

Multi-Religion

Multi-religion refers to the diversity of religions within a community, region, or country (Ting & Lee, 2019). This implies that different religions are practiced by people living in the same geographical location. For example, in Indonesia, the people adhere to six official religions, namely Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The concept of multi-religion encompasses tolerance, respect, and recognition of the diversity of religions, as well as the development of interactions among various religious groups (Van Beek et al., 2020). It emphasizes the importance of interreligious dialogues and respect for differences in beliefs to promote harmony and peace among religiously diverse communities.

Multi-religion indicators serve as measures to assess the extent to which a society or country can accommodate and respect religious diversity. These indicators cover essential aspects such as religious freedom, tolerance, protection of minority rights, participation, and implementation of public policies by the government (Taghavi & Segalla, 2023). A society that values religious diversity can foster strong solidarity, unity, and cooperation. Tolerance and respect for religious differences enable each religious group to practice their faith safely and peacefully. For instance, in countries such as Indonesia and India, interfaith dialogues have played a vital role in promoting mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence among different religious communities (Blakemore, 2019). Cultural diversity enriches society, and cultivating solidarity and openness to different religious and cultural perspectives can strengthen unity. The diverse contributions of each religious group derive from their respective cultural and traditional heritages, which can promote progress in various fields of life, including social, cultural, and economic development.

Method

This study employed an explanatory mixed-method design to examine the MC level of communities with diverse religious backgrounds and the factors that influenced the formation of their MC. An explanatory mixed-method design is a research design initiated by a quantitative study and followed by a qualitative study to provide detailed explanations or explorations of the preceding data (McKim, 2017). The rationale beyond the adoption of a mixed-method design is because this study sought to reveal both generally representative and in-depth data so that both realistic and naturalistic data could be reported. Generally representative data were indicated by those garnered from survey research, and in-depth data were exhibited by those obtained from qualitative descriptive research. A quantitative survey was used to collect data regarding the level of MC, while a qualitative descriptive design was used to gather data on the factors that contributed to the formation of multireligious communities' MC.

The population of this study consisted of all interfaith communities in Indonesia. Given the large population, this research focused on a sample of communities from three regions in Indonesia, namely North Bengkulu, Kuningan in West Java, and Kediri in East Java. Based on previous research conducted by Daheri et al. (2023), the social demographics of communities in North Bengkulu, Kuningan, and Kediri were representative of ideal interfaith communities to be included in the study. The multireligious demographics of the communities in these three regions represented the adherents of six religions of Indonesia (e.g., Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). Hence, the people had rich data to be revealed pursuant to the purposes of this study.

Quantitative Sample and Qualitative Participants

The sample for survey data pertaining to the level of multireligious communities' MC was obtained using the convenient sampling technique. Out of all the residents residing in the three focal areas of this study, 205 individuals in North Bengkulu, 255 individuals in Kuningan, and 117 individuals in Kediri were willing to complete the MC questionnaires having been distributed earlier. Ones in North Bengkulu consisted of 84 males and 121 females. Those of Kuningan comprised 101 males and 154 females. Those of Kediri consisted of 52 males and 65 females. Totally, 577 individuals officially represented the quantitative sample of this research, who were mostly the adherents of Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism in terms of religious demographics. Additionally, a small number of individuals adhered to Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. The participants aged from 21 to 52 years old.

To obtain data on the factors contributing to the development of multireligious communities' MC, a purposive sampling technique was deployed. The qualitative participants were ones selectively taken from the quantitative survey's sample. Several criteria were used as guidelines to select the qualitative participants. First, the participants were those who managed to convey information related to the discourse negotiated by the interview protocol. Second, they had sufficiently flexible time to get engaged in continuous communication either in a face-to-face mode or virtually. Third, they were voluntarily willing to be the participants. Based on these

criteria, 20 individuals were eligible to be the qualitative participants, and they represented the adherents of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Techniques of Collecting Data

Quantitative data pertinent to the levels of multireligious communities' MC were gathered through a questionnaire copied and distributed to the sample of multireligious communities. The questionnaire was designed to measure MC in the context of multireligious communities based on three theoretical dimensions of MC. The MC dimensions subsumed multicultural awareness, multicultural skills, and multicultural knowledge. Prior to validation, the researchers formulated 35 items, consisting of 12 items representing multicultural awareness, 12 items representing multicultural skills, and 11 items representing multicultural knowledge. All items were contextualized within the discourses of MC and multireligiosity. The questionnaire was formatted using a Likert Scale, where each item was followed by four judgmental options ranging from strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), agree (A), to strongly agree (SA).

A pilot study was conducted with 20 multireligious community members who were not part of the research sample to test the questionnaire's validity. Based on the validity computation using the Bivariate Pearson Correlation formula, 30 items had r values greater than r_{table} of 0.443, obtained from the criteria (df=18 with sig 5%). Meanwhile, 5 items had r values below r_{table} of 0.443. As a result, 30 items were deemed valid for measuring multireligious communities' MC. Based on the questionnaire's dimensions, 10 items fell into the dimension of multicultural awareness, 10 items in the dimension of multicultural skills, and 10 items in the dimension of multicultural knowledge. Within each dimension of the questionnaire, 5 items were positively written, and 5 items were negatively written to be scored in reverse. The reliability of the 30 valid items was tested using the Cronbach Alpha formula, resulting in a value of 0.83, indicating good reliability as it was greater than the minimum threshold of 0.7. Table 1 provides information on the questionnaire's dimensions, number of items, and sample items.

Table 1
The MC questionnaire's blueprint and sample items for multireligious communities

No	Multicultural Dimensions	Numbers of Items	Examples of Items
1	Multicultural awareness	10 items	• I understand that in multireligious communities, there are cultural and belief differences that need to be respected. • In my opinion, learning about different cultures and beliefs is not very important (This item is scored in reverse).
2	Multicultural Skills	10 items	• I am able to adapt quickly to situations involving cultural and religious differences. • I cannot respect the beliefs and cultures of others because they differ from what I

No	Multicultural Dimensions	Numbers of Items	Examples of Items
3	Multicultural knowledge	10 items	believe and practice (This item is scored in reverse). • I have knowledge about the history and development of religions in multireligious communities. • I don't have knowledge about the values and cultural norms of various religious groups in multireligious communities (This item is scored in reverse).

Considering that the samples were of Indonesian language users, all questionnaire items had been translated into the Indonesian language to facilitate the samples in understanding the negotiated questionnaire items.

Qualitative data were gathered using interviews to explore the factors that shape multireligious communities' MC. Prior to the interviews, the researchers had prepared an interview protocol that was grounded in the three dimensions of MC: multicultural awareness, multicultural skills, and multicultural knowledge. As the foregoing dimensions, Multicultural awareness involves profound consciousness of cultural and religious differences in a diverse society, fostering positive interactions and conflict avoidance. Multicultural skills encompass the ability to engage effectively with individuals from various cultural and religious backgrounds, including building relationships, conflict resolution, and facilitating productive discussions. Multicultural knowledge extends to insights about religion, culture, and interactions within a multicultural context, encompassing knowledge of various religions, their history, values, norms, and contributions, as well as intercultural communication and a commitment to continuous learning about cultural and religious diversity in a multicultural society. The interview protocol consisted of nine questions in total, with each dimension of MC encompassing three questions. All interview questions were designed to prompt participants to engage in self-reflection and discuss the factors that they perceived as contributing to their MC.

Techniques of Data Analysis

Quantitative data related to levels of MC were analysed using descriptive statistics, which included measures of central tendency (i.e., mean), variation (i.e., standard deviation), and categorizations of competence levels. Subsequently, qualitative data on factors shaping MC were analysed using an interactive model as proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consisted of four dimensions of analysis: data collection, data condensation, data presentation, and drawing a conclusion. As previously explained, qualitative data were collected using interviews formatted to elicit participants' self-reflection on the factors contributing to their MC. Regarding data condensation, the interview data were critically reviewed to generate several representative themes, and the data were grouped based on these themes. As presented in the results section, there were five themes coded from the raw data, which represented the

contributing factors of MC formation. The aforesaid themes entailed the attitude of mutual respect, the attitude of tolerance, the internalization of multicultural attitudes, well-established communication, and interactions with cultural traditions. Under each theme, the data were further analysed to identify interconnections. For data presentation, the coded data based on themes were reviewed again, and the most representative data were selected to summarize the entire dataset. The data were further presented, interpreted, and theoretically discussed. Finally, to draw a conclusion, all data were summarized in an effective, comprehensive, and representative fashion.

Results

The research results are presented based on the orientations of two formulated research problems addressing the level of MC and the factors shaping MC. The level of multireligious communities' MC is presented by demonstrating the results of quantitative analysis. The factors shaping multireligious communities' MC are presented by demonstrating the results of qualitative analysis.

Multireligious Communities' Multicultural Competence

The multireligious communities' MC was measured by involving 577 respondents. Quantitative descriptive analysis of the community's MC produced measures of mean, standard deviation (SD), and level of each MC dimension. The analysis results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
The levels of multireligious communities' multicultural competence

| Dimension	Mean	SD	Category
Multicultural awareness	3.78	0.53	High
Multicultural skills	3.61	0.41	High
Multicultural knowledge	3.55	0.45	High
The average of all dimensions	3.64		High

Table 2 reports that multireligious respondents had a high level of MC in each dimension measured. The dimension of multicultural awareness had a mean of 3.78 and SD of 0.53, indicating that the respondents had a high level of awareness of the cultural and religious diversity in their surroundings. The dimension of multicultural skills had a mean of 3.61 and SD of 0.41, indicating that the respondents possessed good skills at interacting with people from different cultures and religions. Meanwhile, the dimension of multicultural knowledge had a mean of 3.55 and SD of 0.45, indicating that the respondents had good knowledge about cultural and religious diversity. The average of all dimensions was 3.64, suggesting that the respondents had a high level of MC. This was also reflected in the achieved level of MC, which was High, indicating that the respondents had abilities to appreciate cultural and religious diversity around them.

Factors Contributing to the Formation of Multireligious Communities' Multicultural Competence

The factors that contributed to the formation of multireligious communities' high MC were qualitatively investigated through interviews involving 20 participants selected using a purposive sampling technique. The results of data analysis on interview data yielded five specific themes, and these themes represented the factors that played pivotal roles in shaping the multireligious communities' MC. These factors entailed the attitude of mutual respect, the attitude of tolerance, internalization of multicultural attitudes, well-established communication, and interactions with cultural traditions. A concise interconnection among these factors can be seen in figure 1.

Figure 1
Factors contributing to the formation of multireligious communities' MC
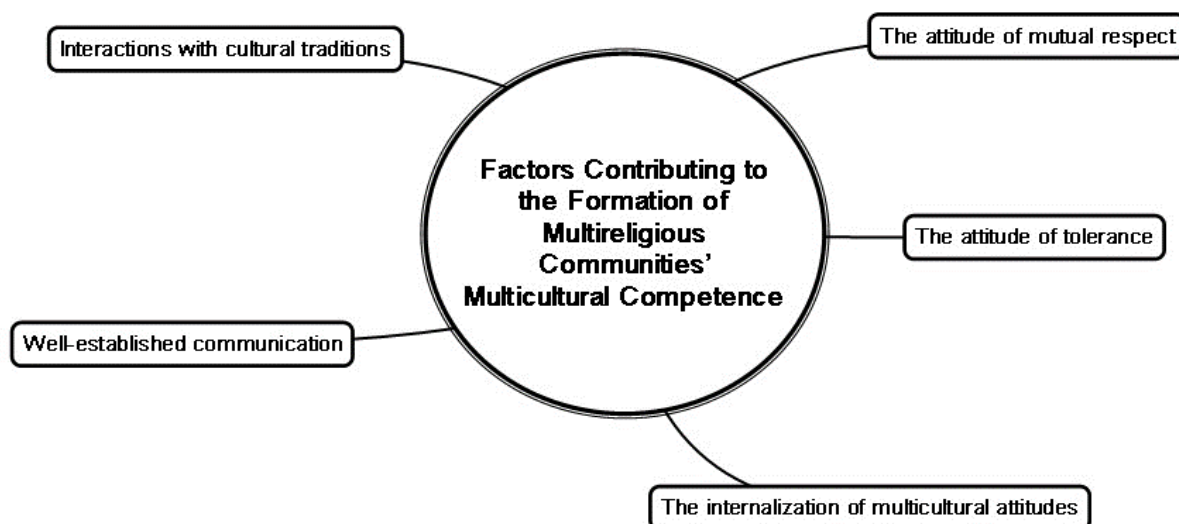
The Attitude of Mutual Respect

The first factor that influenced the multireligious communities' high MC was the attitude of mutual respect. This could be observed from their habits of understanding and respecting the essence of every religious ritual performed by individuals of different religions. For instance, during an interview with a religious figure, a participant explained the following information:

> I respect everyone's religion as a personal right. As an Islamic leader, I'm happy to educate the non-Muslim community in our city for peaceful coexistence (An interview with a religious figure).

The above transcript reflects that the participant understood the importance of interfaith cooperation and strove to foster positive thinking in the community to strengthen MC. Furthermore, in an interview with a Hindu youth, he expressed the following:

> I grew up in this city where most of the residents are Muslims. However, I felt comfortable because we respect and honour each other's beliefs. I also learned a lot about other religions from my friends who are Muslims, and this has broadened my understanding of diversity and tolerance (An interview with a citizen).

The above transcript highlights that mutual respect is essential for strengthening multireligious communities (MC) by fostering open-mindedness and sustaining harmony among individuals of diverse faiths. The preceding transcripts depict that the participants had an attitude of mutual respect as a factor contributing to the formation of their high MC. This qualitative data supports the high level of participants' MC as examined in previous quantitative survey.

The Attitude of Tolerance

The second factor contributing to the formation of high MC was tolerance. Tolerance means embracing differences and reducing conflicts among people of different faiths. An example could be seen in the transcript of an interview with a Hindu religious leader who stated the following:

> We all know that Indonesia is a country with rich religious diversity. As a Hindu religious leader, I always teach my congregation to respect differences and embrace diversity as a positive part of life. I also frequently collaborate with religious leaders from other faiths to organize activities that strengthen tolerance and mutual understanding among people of different religions in our community (An interview with a religious leader).

The preceding excerpt highlights a commitment to foster interfaith harmony and peace through collaboration and tolerance. Another example can be found in an interview with a Christian religious figure, who stated the following:

> In our village, most of the population is Christian. However, we have neighbours who are Muslim and Buddhist. We always strive to respect and accept these differences as part of a beautiful life. I also always teach my congregation about the importance of respecting and tolerating religious differences. We always live with harmony and peace (An interview with a religious figure).

From the interview, the participant cherished religious diversity, promoting tolerance for interfaith harmony in the village. The participant actively internalize tolerance to their congregation, stressing its broader relevance. The peaceful coexistence of diverse religions in the village underscores the participant's vital role in fostering interfaith harmony. The preceding transcripts portray that the participants had an attitude of tolerance as a contributing factor of their high MC formation. This qualitative data goes hand in hand with the high level of participants' MC as examined in previous quantitative survey.

The Internalization of Multicultural Attitudes

The third factor that had been identified as a contributor to the MC formation was the internalization of multicultural attitudes. The preceding involved the ability to adapt and practice multicultural values in daily life, as evidenced by the community's efforts to build positive thinking and a better understanding of diversity. An example of an interview excerpt illustrating the internalization of multicultural attitudes is as follows:

> I always try to understand diversity in my daily life. I respect diversity, and I am happy when I interact with people from different backgrounds. I also try to maintain good relationships with everyone, including those who have cultural, religious, and lingual differences. For example, when I work in the office, I always try to adapt myself to people with different backgrounds to create a positive and harmonious work environment (An interview with a citizen).

The preceding highlights the participant's strong multicultural attitude, emphasizing her capacity for positive cognitive growth and advanced diversity comprehension. Another example of the internalization of multicultural attitudes could be seen in the following excerpt:

> Our teacher at school always taught us to appreciate differences. Every time we learned about different cultures or religions, she provided clear explanations and encouraged us to respect those differences. I also enjoyed events that showcased diversity at school, such as Eid al-Fitr or Christmas celebrations. I feel that it helped me and others to understand diversity better and apply multicultural values in our daily lives (An interview with a student).

The above excerpt stresses daily experiences and education in shaping multicultural attitudes, emphasizing the significance of diverse environments for MC development. The preceding transcripts demonstrate that the participants had been habituated to live with multicultural environments. Such a habit led to natural internalization of multicultural attitude, and the foregoing condition paved the way for their high MC. This qualitative data aligns with the high level of participants' MC as scrutinized through quantitative survey research in prior.

Well-Established Communication

The fourth factor that shaped high MC was effective communication among members of different religious communities. This factor was crucial in developing MC, as effective communication enabled individuals to build better relationships, respect, and understand each other's diversity. The foregoing is depicted in the following interview transcript:

> Open and honest communication among members of different religious communities is crucial in building harmonious relationships. I ever experienced situations where I disagreed with others due to religious differences, but we were still able to respect and understand each other through open and honest communication. Effective communication helped us to resolve our differing views positively and constructively (An interview with a citizen).

The interview transcript highlights the participant's strong grasp of how open communication fosters better understanding and tolerance among people of different religions. The importance of communication as a factor in shaping MC is also depicted in the following interview transcript:

> As a student, I have faced differences on campus, whether in terms of religions, cultures, or languages. Good communication has been very helpful in helping me understand other people's perspectives and resolve conflicts that arise due to differences. I have also learned to appreciate diversity and communicate respectfully, so my relationships with others on campus have improved (An interview with a tertiary student).

In the above interview excerpt, it was evident that effective communication could assist the participant in understanding the perspectives of others and resolving conflicts that arose due to differences. This indicated that effective communication could help strengthen MC and shape a better understanding of diversity. The preceding transcripts indicate that the participants' good communication scaffolded the high MC as already revealed in the previous quantitative survey. In other words, this qualitative data supports the quantitative survey's data.

Interactions with Cultural Traditions

The fifth factor that shaped multireligious communities' high MC was interactions with cultural traditions. Through such interactions, people could understand and appreciate the diversity of cultures and religions that existed around them, thereby reducing conflicts and strengthening harmony. The interview excerpt that supported this data is as follows:

> I think that it is through interactions with cultural traditions that society can become acquainted with and understand the diversity of cultures and religions that exist around them. This is essential because by knowing and understanding this diversity, there will be a sense of mutual respect and appreciation for one another, thus strengthening the harmony among different religious communities (An interview with a citizen).

The interview excerpt demonstrates how interactions with cultural traditions enable individuals to understand and appreciate cultural and religious differences, fostering mutual respect and diversity appreciation. Interactions with cultural traditions could contribute to reducing conflicts and strengthening harmony. Such interactions espouse the high level of participants' MC as previously examined from the quantitative survey.

Discussion

This study produced two sets of data, namely quantitative data regarding the level of multireligious communities' MC and qualitative data on the factors that shaped MC. Concerning the level of multireligious communities' MC, the data indicated that they had a high level of MC in every measured dimension. The dimensions measured were multicultural awareness, multicultural skills, and multicultural knowledge. The average score for all three

dimensions was 3.64, which fell under a high category. Multicultural awareness had the highest mean of 3.78, indicating that multireligious communities had a strong awareness of the importance of understanding and appreciating cultural diversity. Multicultural skills were in the middle of the high category with a mean of 3.61. Lastly, multicultural knowledge had the lowest mean of 3.55 but still fell under a high category. The standard deviation or variability of each dimension was relatively small, ranging from 0.41 to 0.53, indicating that the measurement results were relatively stable and consistent in every dimension. In other words, multireligious communities had a consistent level of MC in every measured dimension. This study supports MC theory, which posits that those with high MC possess the awareness, skills, and knowledge to engage effectively with cultural and religious diversity (Sarli & Phillimore, 2022). In other words, the foregoing elucidates that MC includes recognizing cultural differences, interacting adeptly, and understanding diversity's societal impact (Presseau et al., 2019).

Several previous studies have been conducted on MC in different contexts. One of these studies was conducted by O'Hara et al. (2021) with the aim of enhancing MC and advocacy in culturally responsive counselling research. The results assist counselling researchers in understanding how cultural dynamics influence their research and promote social justice. Another study by Presseau et al. (2019) found that MC has the strongest positive relationship with social justice advocacy, and multicultural training environments indirectly influence social justice advocacy through MC. Furthermore, Harris et al. (2019) evaluated the effectiveness of study abroad experiences in enhancing students' MC and found that both direct and indirect approaches are effective in increasing students' understanding of multicultural perspectives, norms, rituals, and practices. The preceding studies underscore the importance of developing MC in counselling research, training, and study-abroad experiences for students.

The present study continuously explored information on the qualitative factors that shaped multireligious communities' MC. This study showed that high MC was shaped by five factors that subsumed mutual respect, tolerance, internalization of multicultural attitudes, good communication, and interactions with cultural traditions.

Regarding the first factor of MC, mutual respect demonstrated by the present study's participants triggered collaborative interactions, leading to avoidance of possible social conflicts. Such collaborations have been elucidated by Davis et al. (2016) by highlighting the importance of orientation toward others to understand others' cultural views while getting engaged in intercultural interactions. They emphasized that multiculturalism is supported by one's focus on otherness for the sake of establishing ideal intercultural interactions. In the same line, Kivlighan III et al. (2023) confirmed that otherness-oriented focus contributes to the embodiment of collaborations across individuals of different cultures. Warsah et al. (2019) stressed the significance of mutual respect, encompassing empathy, respect, and tolerance, in fostering MC. Yanto et al. (2021) found that higher levels of mutual respect correlated with more successful interactions across cultures. Morganna et al. (2020) reported a strong mutual respect-MC link, particularly in intercultural language learning. Strategies like multicultural training and education programs effectively enhance mutual respect and communication skills with diverse cultures (Safa & Tofighi, 2022). In summary, mutual respect is pivotal in MC development and can be strengthened through initiatives like multicultural training and education programs.

Regarding the second factor of MC, tolerance is defined as an individual's ability to accept differences in cultures, beliefs, and perspectives while interacting positively with others (Warsah, 2020). Asha et al. (2022) suggested that mindful and cross-cultural interactions trigger an increase in tolerance. Daheri et al. (2023) demonstrated that positive experiences with culturally diverse individuals significantly enhance an individual's tolerance. The present study's finding is consistent with Uyun and Warsah's (2022) study exhibiting that direct experiences and contact with diverse groups significantly improve tolerance and intergroup relationships. Effective approaches to multicultural education can also help to increase tolerance, understanding of cultural diversity, and appreciation of individual differences (Arphattananon, 2018). Furthermore, a study by Kim and Connelly (2019) revealed that implementing multicultural education approaches in early childhood education programs can enhance understanding and positive attitudes toward cultural diversity, leading to an increase in tolerance.

Regarding the third factor of MC, the internalization of multicultural attitudes plays a vital role in developing positive attitudes towards cultural and religious diversity, as well as understanding differences and positively interacting with people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. According to Presseau et al. (2019), multicultural knowledge is crucial for internalizing attitudes that foster tolerance, appreciation of differences, and empathy towards diverse cultures and religions. Daheri et al. (2023) found that higher internalization of multicultural attitudes is associated with superior multicultural knowledge and skills, while Kim and Rundgren (2021) noted a similar trend among elementary school teachers.

Regarding the fourth factor of MC, well-established communication can help strengthen understanding and appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity. Baker and Sangiamchit (2019) emphasized that effective multicultural communication entails not only comprehending and accepting cultural differences but also mindful language usage. Furthermore, Alaei and Nosrati (2018) linked understanding cultural differences to effective cross-cultural communication. Erdogan and Okumuslar (2020) connected open communication to reduced prejudice and increased cooperation in diverse groups. In the meantime, Badrkoohi (2018) tied mindful language use to tension reduction and heightened multicultural awareness.

Regarding the fifth factor of MC, interacting with cultural traditions can aid individuals in comprehending the norms, values, and practices of diverse cultures, thereby enabling them to interact and communicate more effectively with people from diverse backgrounds (Warsah, Sarwinda, et al., 2021). Several recent studies have emphasized the importance of interacting with cultural traditions in developing MC. For instance, Datta (2019) and Joseph et al. (2020) showed that cultural activities, such as traditional dance and music, can enhance understanding, knowledge, and skills in interacting with different cultures. Similarly, Prest (2020) demonstrated that interactions with cultural traditions can mitigate stereotypes and prejudices related to particular cultures.

This study's key factors contribute to offering practical guidance for the development of MC programs in diverse communities, encompassing interfaith dialogues, multicultural education, cultural traditions, and communication training. Fostering diversity celebration is crucial for internalizing multicultural attitudes, promoting understanding, and harmonious coexistence in multireligious communities. Policymakers, leaders, and educators can use these insights to foster multiculturalism and harmony.

This study is not without a limitation. The cross-sectional design of the study, collecting data at a single point in time, restricts the exploration of changes in MC over time and the establishment of causal relationships among variables.

Conclusion

Driven by the importance of MC as to help multireligious communities deal with complex interactions taking place in the repertoire of religious and cultural differences, the present study has been conducted to measure the MC level of Indonesia's multireligious communities and to explore the factors contributing to the formation of their MC. This study has revealed that Indonesia's multireligious communities have a high level of MC in all dimensions measured, including multicultural awareness, skills, and knowledge. Subsequently, this study has exhibited five key factors contributing to the formation of multireligious communities' MC. These factors include mutual respect, tolerance, internalization of multicultural attitudes, well-established communication, and interactions with cultural traditions. Mutual respect is found to be essential in maintaining harmony and peace among people of different faiths, while tolerance helps minimize conflicts and promote understanding. The internalization of multicultural attitudes and the emphasis on multicultural education and social environments also play a vital role in shaping MC. Well-established communication is essential in building better relationships and resolving conflicts. Lastly, interactions with cultural traditions enrich the communities' knowledge and understanding of cultural and religious diversity, contributing to developing MC and fostering harmonious relationships among different religious communities. It is recommended that further studies be conducted to work more extensively on the five MC factors revealed by this study to develop educational programs and interventions to help youth acquire MC.

Acknowledgments

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