

Students' Perceptions of Interfaith Tolerance as a Key to Harmony in Campus Life

Yasin Azhari¹, M. Rizky Akbar Alfarizi², Ferry Ardiansyah³, Sheva Yudha Pratama⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Logistics Management, Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic, Bekasi City

Article History

Received : 05 May 2025

Revised : 09 June 2025

Accepted : 27 August 2025

Published : 27 August 2025

Corresponding author*:

kang.yazra@gmail.com

Cite This Article:

Yasin Azhari, M. Rizky Akbar Alfarizi, Ferry Ardiansyah, & Sheva Yudha Pratama. (2025). Students' Perceptions of Interfaith Tolerance as a Key to Harmony in Campus Life. *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan*, 4(2), 38–45.

Abstract: This study seeks to explore students' perceptions of interfaith tolerance within campus life, with a particular focus on second-semester students at Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic. Campus life is often regarded as a microcosm of a multicultural society and thus serves as a strategic arena for nurturing values of tolerance and interreligious harmony. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 20 respondents representing diverse religious backgrounds. The findings reveal that students generally hold a positive perception of tolerance, viewing it as a fundamental principle for fostering peaceful and harmonious interactions on campus. These results are consistent with previous research, which underscores the significant role of tolerance education in shaping inclusive, cohesive, and productive social environments.

Keywords: interfaith tolerance, students' perception, campus life, multicultural society, qualitative study, Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.56127/jushpen.v4i2.2270>

INTRODUCTION

Interfaith tolerance is a noble and fundamental value in national and civic life, particularly in Indonesia, which is recognized as a country characterized by religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. In a pluralistic society such as Indonesia, the presence of tolerance values is essential for maintaining social cohesion, strengthening mutual respect, and fostering harmony in interpersonal interactions. Without tolerance, religion-based or identity-driven conflicts can easily emerge, disrupting social stability—even within educational settings. In the academic environment, tolerance stands as one of the key pillars in building a healthy and inclusive atmosphere.

The campus, as a gathering place for students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, represents a microcosm of the wider, multicultural society. Through interactions among students of different identities, the values of respect and acceptance of differences become crucial to instill. Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic, as one of Indonesia's vocational higher education institutions, is also inseparable from this reality of diversity.

Students from varied ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds study together within the same academic space. This condition creates a strategic opportunity for the institution to cultivate inclusive character education and embed tolerance as an integral part of shaping ethical, socially responsible students with strong national insight. Education, therefore, should not only be oriented toward technical skills but also toward the holistic development of individuals capable of coexisting peacefully amidst diversity.

Nevertheless, intolerance remains a phenomenon that cannot be overlooked, including within higher education. Intolerance may manifest in various forms, such as prejudice against particular religions, exclusive behavior from certain religious groups, or discrimination in both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Such occurrences highlight the ongoing challenges in instilling tolerance evenly among the younger generation, particularly students. According to Setara Institute (2021), the level of intolerance among students and university learners remains relatively high in several regions of Indonesia. This is a matter of serious concern, considering the role of students as agents of change who are expected to champion peace and harmony.

Therefore, educational approaches and institutional policies are required to foster awareness of the importance of interfaith tolerance from an early stage and in a sustainable manner. This study was conducted to investigate students' perceptions of interfaith tolerance within the academic environment of Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic. The research is significant as it provides an initial overview of students' attitudes and understanding of tolerance, while also serving as a foundation for formulating strategies to enhance a harmonious and inclusive campus life. By understanding student perceptions, higher education institutions can take strategic steps to build an academic culture that upholds the values of diversity and interreligious harmony.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Religious Tolerance

Religious tolerance is widely recognized as one of the fundamental pillars in sustaining peace and social harmony within pluralistic societies. Ali and Asrori (2018) emphasize that tolerance is not merely the absence of conflict but also the active recognition and respect for religious diversity. In the Indonesian context, where pluralism is deeply rooted in society, tolerance is considered essential to prevent conflict and foster national unity. Rahardjo (2017) highlights that tolerance must be understood as both a moral value and a social practice embedded in daily interactions.

Tolerance in the Academic Environment

The campus is often regarded as a microcosm of society, where individuals from diverse religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds interact on a daily basis. Harahap and Yani (2021) argue that higher education institutions play a strategic role in fostering interfaith dialogue as a means of promoting student harmony. Similarly, Yusuf and Farida (2019) underline that tolerance education within universities helps cultivate inclusive attitudes and prepares students to become agents of peace in wider society. In this sense, tolerance is not only a personal disposition but also a critical component of academic culture.

Student Perceptions and Socialization of Tolerance

Student perceptions of tolerance are shaped by a combination of early socialization and educational experiences. According to Wibowo (2022), interfaith dialogue significantly influences the development of inclusive character among students. Setara Institute (2021) further reports that intolerance among students remains a challenge in some regions of Indonesia, indicating that personal attitudes of tolerance need to be reinforced by institutional culture. Nugroho (2020) also observes that students play an important role in building moderate communities, particularly through peer interactions and participation in collective activities.

Institutional Role in Promoting Interfaith Harmony

The role of universities and polytechnics is not limited to providing technical education but extends to shaping students' social and ethical character. Suhadi (2016) stresses that interfaith dialogue within academic settings can serve as an effective tool for bridging differences and preventing exclusivity among religious groups. The creation of safe, dialogical, and inclusive spaces—such as interfaith forums, seminars, and collaborative projects—has been proven to enhance mutual respect and solidarity (Harahap & Yani, 2021). This underscores the importance of institutional policies and structured programs in embedding tolerance as a campus culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with the primary aim of portraying and analyzing students' perceptions of interfaith tolerance within the campus environment of Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic. The central focus was to examine the extent to which students understand, respond to, and practice the values of tolerance in their daily academic interactions. Data were collected using a single main instrument, namely a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed based on a Likert scale, which enabled the researcher to measure the intensity of students' attitudes and viewpoints regarding various aspects of interfaith tolerance. The items in the questionnaire covered several dimensions, including perceptions of the importance of tolerance, experiences of interaction with peers from different religions, participation in interfaith activities, and perspectives on the role of the campus institution in facilitating religious harmony.

The questionnaire was distributed to 20 second-semester students from different study programs at Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic. Respondents were selected purposively, taking into account the diversity of their religious backgrounds so that the findings could provide a representative picture of the state of tolerance within the campus. The data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed descriptively, with an emphasis on presenting frequencies, percentages, and response trends for each statement posed. This approach was chosen as it allows for a comprehensive understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions regarding interfaith tolerance. Through this qualitative descriptive method based on questionnaire data, the study seeks to capture the actual dynamics of students' attitudes while also laying the groundwork for recommendations to strengthen tolerance in campus life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

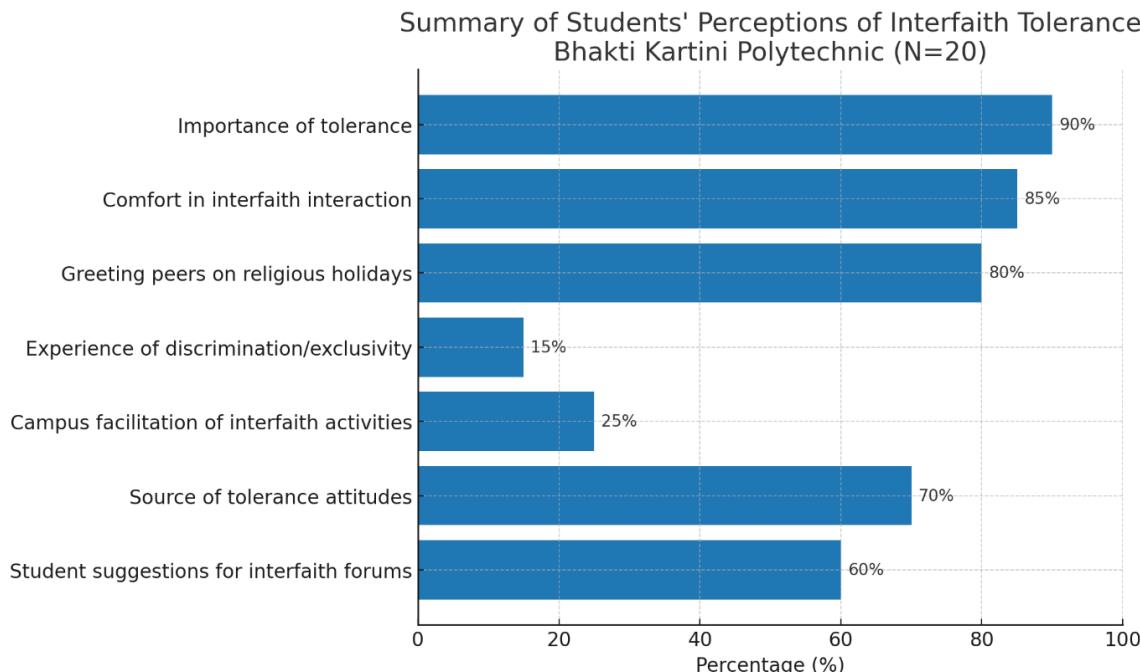
This study successfully gathered data from 20 second-semester students of Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic, representing diverse religious backgrounds, including Islam, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, and Hinduism. Through the completion of questionnaires addressing various aspects of interfaith tolerance, a general overview was obtained regarding students' attitudes and perceptions of the importance of living harmoniously in diversity. Overall, the results indicate that the majority of students hold a positive understanding and attitude toward tolerance. When asked about the importance of interfaith tolerance, 90% of respondents stated that it is highly essential for creating a harmonious and peaceful campus atmosphere. This finding demonstrates students' awareness of the crucial role tolerance plays in maintaining healthy social relationships within the academic environment. Such positive attitudes are also reflected in daily practices, as 85% of students reported feeling comfortable interacting and collaborating in groups with peers from different religions.

Students expressed that religious differences are not seen as obstacles but rather as assets that enrich perspectives and strengthen solidarity. In terms of practical expressions of tolerance, 80% of respondents reported that they habitually extend greetings to peers of different religions during the celebration of religious holidays. This serves as strong evidence that tolerance is not only understood conceptually but also embodied in simple, tangible actions that reflect respect for differences. Nevertheless, several critical notes were identified. Approximately 25% of respondents indicated that they did not perceive the campus as actively facilitating interfaith activities, such as religious dialogues, discussion forums, or joint seminars among religious organizations. This highlights the need for the institution to play a more active role in creating inclusive and open spaces for student interaction.

In addition, the findings reveal that 70% of students acknowledged that their tolerant attitudes were largely shaped by early socialization in their families and previous schooling. This suggests that the formation of tolerant character is strongly influenced by prior social experiences, while the role of higher education institutions is to further strengthen these values through broader learning opportunities and social interactions. The following table summarizes the key findings derived from the questionnaire analysis:

Table 1. Summary of Student Perceptions at Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic

Investigated Aspect	Key Findings	Respondents / Percentage
Perception of the importance of tolerance	Tolerance considered highly important in campus life	90% (18 out of 20)
Comfort in interfaith interaction	Feel comfortable working with peers of different religions	85% (17 out of 20)
Greeting peers on religious holidays	Habitually extend greetings on others' religious celebrations	80% (16 out of 20)
Experience of discrimination or exclusivity	No personal discrimination, but noted existence of exclusive organizations	15% (3 out of 20)
Campus facilitation of interfaith activities	Perceive campus as not sufficiently active in interfaith initiatives	25% (5 out of 20)
Source of tolerance attitudes	Shaped primarily by family upbringing and prior schooling	70% (14 out of 20)
Student suggestions	Proposed establishment of interfaith forums and seminars	60% (12 out of 20)



Interpretation of Findings

The graph above illustrates that key aspects such as the importance of tolerance, comfort in interfaith interactions, and respect for religious celebrations received high levels of agreement from respondents. Meanwhile, aspects such as the campus' involvement in facilitating interfaith activities and the persistence of exclusive organizational practices suggest that there remains room for improvement and the development of more inclusive policies. Taken as a whole, the findings indicate that students at Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic generally demonstrate a constructive understanding and attitude toward interfaith tolerance. They not only recognize the importance of tolerance as a core value but have also begun to incorporate it into their daily lives. The role of the campus as a facilitator of interfaith interaction is therefore essential to ensure that these values continue to grow and become fully internalized in academic life.

Follow-up questionnaire results further reinforce the initial findings, showing that Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic students generally hold very positive perceptions of the importance of interfaith tolerance in campus life. Regarding comfort in interfaith interaction, 85% of respondents reported feeling very comfortable or reasonably comfortable working in religiously heterogeneous groups. This indicates that differences in belief are not perceived as barriers to building healthy social relationships but are instead regarded as opportunities to broaden perspectives and strengthen solidarity. However, the responses concerning the openness of religious organizations reveal that 25% of students feel that some groups remain exclusive toward members of other religions. Such exclusivity may hinder interfaith dialogue and reinforce social boundaries within the campus community. This suggests that although students' individual attitudes tend to be tolerant, the broader social and organizational structures on campus do not yet fully support diversity in a structural manner.

In terms of the formation of tolerance values, a majority of respondents (70%) acknowledged that these values had already been instilled and internalized since childhood through family upbringing and formal schooling. This highlights that tolerance is not merely a product of the campus environment but a continuous process that begins early in life. Hence, the role of higher education institutions is to act as a reinforcer and maturer of

such values, through systematic practices and structured intercultural and interfaith learning.

Another notable finding is the gap between awareness of tolerance and active participation in campus-based activities related to diversity. In other words, while students already demonstrate tolerant awareness, they are not yet fully provided with the platforms or opportunities to collectively and systematically express it within public campus spaces. The institution, therefore, needs to take a more proactive role in establishing an ecosystem for interfaith dialogue through regular forums, interfaith seminars, and cross-cultural events that engage student organizations from diverse religious backgrounds.

Equally significant is the high proportion of students (80%) who reported being accustomed to greeting friends of different religions during their respective religious holidays. This practice represents a tangible form of symbolic tolerance and serves as a strong indicator of success in fostering respect for diversity. Although simple, such gestures can have a profound impact on strengthening social cohesion within a pluralistic academic environment.

A total of 92% of students also expressed support for the regular organization of interfaith forums and seminars. This reflects a genuine need for spaces of interreligious dialogue that function as platforms for learning, reflection, and the unification of perspectives. Such recommendations are highly relevant for the campus administration to begin developing policies and programs that explicitly and systematically address issues of diversity. In this regard, the cultivation of tolerance cannot rely solely on students' individual attitudes but requires the consistent support of institutional culture. The campus must serve as the primary facilitator in shaping healthy, dialogical, and inclusive spaces of interaction for all its members. Only through a comprehensive approach—spanning both individual and institutional levels—can the values of tolerance be nurtured into a strong and sustainable campus culture.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study involving 20 second-semester students of Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic, it can be concluded that, in general, students hold positive perceptions and inclusive attitudes toward the values of interfaith tolerance. The majority of respondents regarded tolerance as highly important for creating a harmonious campus atmosphere, and they reported feeling comfortable interacting and collaborating with peers from different religious backgrounds. Acts of tolerance were also reflected in their everyday practices, such as the habit of extending greetings during the religious celebrations of friends from other faiths. This demonstrates that tolerance is not only understood conceptually but also internalized and manifested in concrete behaviors. Nevertheless, despite the students' strong individual attitudes of tolerance, structural challenges remain, such as tendencies toward exclusivity within religious organizations and the limited provision of campus facilities to actively support interfaith initiatives.

Another important finding is that tolerant attitudes are largely shaped by early family upbringing and previous educational experiences. This highlights the strategic role of higher education institutions in reinforcing, cultivating, and expanding these values through inclusive and participatory academic and non-academic programs. Furthermore, most students expressed their support for the establishment of regular interfaith forums, seminars, and discussions. Consequently, the role of the campus institution is crucial in creating safe and dialogical spaces of encounter, while fostering a culture of tolerance that goes beyond formal initiatives and becomes embedded in students' daily academic and social life.

In conclusion, tolerance should not merely be viewed as an individual disposition but must be reinforced through institutional culture, open campus policies, and the creation of healthy, constructive interfaith interactions. Tolerance must be nurtured as one of the fundamental pillars in building a peaceful, just, and diversity-respecting campus community.

In light of the findings and conclusion of this study, several recommendations can be proposed to strengthen the practice of interfaith tolerance within the academic environment of Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic:

1. Institutional Facilitation of Interfaith Dialogue

The campus should actively organize regular forums, seminars, and workshops that promote interfaith dialogue. These activities can provide students with structured opportunities to share experiences, reduce prejudices, and build mutual understanding across religious differences.

2. Integration of Tolerance Education into the Curriculum

Beyond extracurricular activities, tolerance should be embedded into academic courses, particularly within general education subjects such as civic education, ethics, and social sciences. This will ensure that students not only learn technical knowledge but also develop civic and moral awareness.

3. Strengthening Inclusive Student Organizations

To minimize exclusivity and potential segregation, student organizations should be encouraged to adopt inclusive policies. Interfaith or multicultural student clubs can be established as platforms for cross-cultural collaboration and shared learning experiences.

4. Parental and Community Engagement

Since family upbringing and early education play a significant role in shaping tolerant attitudes, campuses can collaborate with families and local communities to reinforce tolerance education. Joint community service projects that involve diverse groups of students may also help broaden perspectives.

5. Policy and Leadership Commitment

Institutional leaders must demonstrate a strong commitment to tolerance by enacting supportive policies and modeling inclusive leadership. This includes developing campus codes of conduct that emphasize respect for diversity and implementing clear measures against intolerance or discrimination.

By implementing these recommendations, Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic can further cultivate a holistic campus culture where tolerance is not only a personal virtue but also a collective and institutionalized value, ensuring the creation of a truly inclusive and harmonious academic environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Bhakti Kartini Polytechnic for providing the support and academic environment that made this study possible. Special thanks are also extended to the second-semester students who participated in this research for their valuable time, openness, and thoughtful responses, which greatly enriched the findings of this study.

In addition, the authors acknowledge the constructive feedback from colleagues and lecturers in the Department of Logistics Management, whose insights and encouragement helped refine both the research process and the manuscript. Finally, the authors are deeply grateful to their families for their continuous support and motivation throughout the completion of this work.

REFERENCES

M. Ali and M. Asrori, "Religious tolerance in the perspective of Islamic education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 133–149, 2018, doi: 10.14421/jpi.2018.62.133-149.

I. Harahap and R. Yani, "Interfaith dialogue as an effort to foster student harmony on campus," *Jurnal Sosial Humaniora*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 101–115, 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://ejournal.unsri.ac.id/index.php/jsh/article/view/13245>

M. B. Miles and A. M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.

F. Nugroho, "The role of students in building a moderate society," *Jurnal Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 45–59, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://ejournal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-pkn/article/view/37450>

M. D. Rahardjo, "Religious tolerance amidst Indonesia's diversity," *Jurnal Filsafat*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 297–312, 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://jurnalfilsafat.ugm.ac.id/article/view/23672>

Setara Institute, *Tolerance City Index 2021*. Jakarta: Setara Institute for Democracy and Peace, 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://setara-institute.org/indeks-kota-toleran-ikt-2021/>

D. Wibowo, "The impact of interfaith dialogue on the development of students' inclusive character," *Jurnal Studi Agama*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 55–67, 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studi-agama/article/view/21568>

M. Yusuf and I. Farida, "Tolerance education in the multicultural context of higher education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Multikultural*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 92–105, 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://jurnal.unpad.ac.id/jpm/article/view/25911>

Suhadi, *Inter-Religious Dialogue in Indonesia: A Study of Religious Tolerance among Students in Yogyakarta*. Yogyakarta: CRCS UGM Press, 2016. [Online]. Available: <https://crcs.ugmac.id/publications/interfaith-dialogue-in-indonesia/>