

# Teaching Peace: A Blueprint for Interfaith Harmony through Cultural Programmes in Religious Institutions

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the role of religious educational institutions in promoting peace-building by examining the programmes implemented at Klaten Hindu Dharma College, Central Java. Specifically, it investigates how these programmes foster interfaith harmony, respect, and social solidarity in a pluralistic society. A qualitative research design with a sociology of religion approach was employed, utilising non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to gather in-depth insights into the institution's peace-building practices. The research found that peace-building programmes, including *Pasraman Astika Siddhi*, blood donation drives, and youth exchanges, effectively promote tolerance and respect among diverse religious communities. The success of these initiatives is attributed to their foundation in Hindu teachings and local cultural values, fostering a harmonious campus environment and strengthening ties with the surrounding community. These findings suggest that religious educational institutions can play a transformative role in peace-building by integrating cultural values and community engagement into their programmes. Such institutions offer a replicable model for fostering interfaith harmony and tolerance from an early age, contributing to broader societal peace. This study provides a unique perspective on peace-building by focusing on an educational setting within a religious institution, a context often overlooked in existing literature. It highlights the potential for religious colleges to serve as agents of social harmony, addressing the challenges of interreligious conflict through culturally informed and values-based approaches.

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## INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life, especially as competition, differences, and disagreements naturally arise within society (Susan, 2014). Darwinism even depicts conflict as a struggle for survival where only the strongest prevail (Sumartono, 2019). Conflicts in the name of religion are also frequently encountered today, although religion itself actually advocates for goodness and peace (Harahap, 2018). Such religious conflicts often arise due to extremists and

radicals who assert the absolute truth of their beliefs while deeming other teachings to be incorrect. In reality, genuine religious teachings promote integration and peace through ideal belief structures, such as worship rituals and religious organisations, which play a critical role in creating harmony within society (Daulay, 2020). Galtung argues that humans possess fundamental needs such as well-being, cultural identity, security, and freedom, which, if fulfilled, can foster peace (Tuwu, 2018). Consequently, initiatives like peace-building programmes are essential in realising these goals.

In Indonesia, issues surrounding religious freedom and interfaith tolerance continue to pose significant challenges. The SETARA Institute recorded 217 incidents with 329 acts of religious freedom violations throughout 2023, marking a substantial increase from the previous year, which saw 175 incidents with 333 actions. According to SETARA Institute's Executive Director, Halili Hasan, of the 329 violations reported, 114 were committed by state actors, while 215 were perpetrated by non-state actors (Setara Institute, 2024). These figures underscore the urgent need for comprehensive peace-building programmes that not only address interreligious tensions but also foster a culture of tolerance and respect within both governmental and community sectors in Indonesia.

Given the ongoing rise in religious freedom violations and interfaith tensions in Indonesia, there is a growing need for more extensive *bina damai* (peace-building) programmes. These initiatives are essential in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance, and respect among diverse religious communities, addressing the root causes of interreligious conflict. By implementing peace-building efforts across multiple levels—educational institutions, local communities, and governmental bodies—Indonesia can work towards creating a more harmonious society. Such programmes not only aim to reduce instances of religious discrimination and violence but also foster long-term social cohesion, contributing to national stability and unity in a multicultural society.

Research on peace-building has been widely undertaken, especially in the context of the general public. Numerous studies indicate that religion, including Islam, can serve as both a source of conflict and a solution to alleviate conflict and violence (Rahmat, 2015). In Indonesia, the government has engaged in various peace-building efforts, such as facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan (Sugara, 2021) and collaborating with communities to counter radicalism (Mantu, 2015). Comprehensive peace-building efforts must be implemented from the elite level to the grassroots, both individually and collectively (Andris & Tambunan, 2023). In practice, these peace-building efforts often utilise local cultural values, such as *piil pesenggiri* (the value of pride and self-respect in the Lampung culture) in Lampung (Utama, 2019) or the Javanese social traditions that uphold values of peace (Sahfutra, 2018). Furthermore, peace-building efforts are reinforced by social partnerships, including the active involvement of women, whose contributions to peace operations significantly impact their success (Paramasatya, 2017). However, most studies focus on peace-building in general communities, while research on peace-building in educational settings, especially in religious institutions, remains limited. Educational units, particularly religious campuses, should play a crucial role in fostering interfaith harmony.

Building upon previous studies, peace-building programmes are multifaceted initiatives aimed at establishing sustainable peace within conflict-affected regions. These programmes often incorporate multiple strategic interventions, such as development assistance, which includes restoring governmental functions, enforcing the rule of law, and revitalising local economies (Gisselquist, 2015, 2017a). Effective programme design and management play a crucial role, as factors like centralised resource allocation and structured management influence the implementation success of peace-building efforts (Samset & Madore, 2006). Moreover, local context and engagement are essential, as supportive local organisations and partners often facilitate positive outcomes even in challenging environments. For instance, local involvement in the Ituri district of the Democratic Republic of Congo proved pivotal despite considerable difficulties (Samset & Madore, 2006). Institutions also contribute significantly to peace-building by fostering stability and addressing the fundamental causes of conflict; this collaborative interaction between external and local processes is crucial for long-term peace (Gisselquist, 2017b; Lutmar, 2018). However, there are challenges within these programmes, including institutional scepticism and the need for structural reforms to enhance the Peacebuilding Commission's relevance and effectiveness (Van Beijnum, 2016). Collectively, these factors highlight that successful peace-building programmes require strategic planning, strong local partnerships, and institutional support, which are essential to establishing and maintaining enduring peace.

Despite the comprehensive nature of previous studies on peace-building programmes, several critical gaps remain unaddressed. Most research has focused on peace-building within broad community settings or in regions affected by overt conflict, often overlooking the unique dynamics and potential of educational environments—particularly religious institutions—as platforms for fostering interfaith harmony and sustainable peace. Furthermore, while numerous studies discuss the importance of local cultural values and institutional roles in peace-building, limited research explores how these principles are implemented and adapted within educational frameworks to shape peace-oriented values among students. This gap is significant, as educational institutions, especially those with religious affiliations, can play a transformative role in preventing conflict by cultivating an early understanding of tolerance and peace. Thus, this study addresses these unexplored areas by examining peace-building efforts within a religious educational setting, aiming to contribute a novel perspective on the role of education in sustaining interfaith harmony and mitigating potential conflicts.

The primary objective of this study is to address the identified gaps in previous literature by exploring the unique role that religious educational institutions can play in peace-building. Specifically, this research aims to examine and analyse the implementation of peace-building programmes at Klaten Hindu Dharma College, focusing on how these initiatives foster interfaith harmony and tolerance within an educational setting. Through this approach, the study seeks to contribute a new perspective by investigating how principles of local cultural values, such as *piil pesenggiri* (pride and self-respect in Lampung culture), and institutional peace-building strategies can be adapted within religious education to prevent conflicts and cultivate a culture of peace from an early stage. This research

not only fills a gap in peace-building studies by focusing on educational settings but also aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of such programmes in religious institutions as a model for other multicultural communities.

This study posits that the peace-building programmes implemented at Klaten Hindu Dharma College are effective in promoting interfaith harmony and tolerance, which in turn contribute to reducing the likelihood of conflict within the educational environment and surrounding communities. The hypothesis is that these programmes, through structured activities and integration of local cultural values, positively impact students' attitudes toward religious tolerance and respect for diversity. This hypothesis suggests a causal relationship in which peace-building programmes within a religious educational institution foster a culture of peace that extends beyond the campus, thus supporting broader social cohesion. Key variables to explore include programme structure, cultural integration, and student perception of interfaith relationships. This exploration will be supported by existing literature on peace-building and cultural adaptation within education, providing a comprehensive foundation for understanding the potential of religious institutions as agents of peace-building.

## METHOD

This research was conducted at Klaten Hindu Dharma College, located in Morangan Village, Karanganom, North Klaten District, Klaten Regency, Central Java. The unit of analysis for this study is the peace-building programmes implemented within the institution, focusing on their influence on promoting interfaith harmony and tolerance. The research also examines individual experiences and organisational efforts within the college as they relate to peace-building.

A qualitative research design with a sociology of religion approach was employed in this study, allowing for an in-depth examination of social phenomena within the educational context. This approach was chosen because it offers a holistic, complex, and detailed view of the peace-building practices in a religious education setting (Setiawan, 2018). The sociology of religion perspective aids in understanding how social and religious conditions influence these programmes, especially within an institution that interacts closely with diverse social groups (Connolly, 2002).

The data for this research were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected directly from the field through methods such as non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2017). Secondary data were obtained from related literature, including books, journals, and articles, which provided theoretical and contextual background on peace-building and its applications in religious education.

Data collection was carried out using various techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with students and staff of Klaten Hindu Dharma College to gain insights into their perspectives and experiences with the peace-building programmes. Non-participant observation allowed the researchers to observe activities within the college's peace-building initiatives directly. Additionally, documentation of peace-

building events and activities provided contextual information and supported the interview and observation data (Yusuf, 2017).

Data analysis in this study followed the Miles and Huberman model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Initially, data reduction was performed by selecting key information relevant to the research objectives. This was followed by presenting the data descriptively to identify patterns and themes in peace-building practices. Finally, the data were verified by comparing the findings with the conceptual framework of the study, thus ensuring alignment between the empirical data and the research objectives (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. *Peace-Building Programme Model at Klaten Hindu Dharma College*

The peace-building programme model represents a structured approach to managing conflict to foster peace. The peace-building programmes at Klaten Hindu Dharma College are divided into two categories: official and non-official programmes. Official programmes aim to establish harmonious relationships between the Hindu community and other communities, while non-official programmes are carried out through collaborations with institutions or community groups in structured events.

*Pasraman Astika Siddhi* (a religious retreat programme for Hindu students, akin to an Islamic *pesantren* or boarding school) is an official activity held in a villa or lodge near the temple and local community. This programme is organised by Klaten Hindu Dharma College annually, focusing on themes of peace and devotion within the surrounding community. The College's *Pasraman Astika Siddhi* programme, themed 'Increasing the Existence of the Hindu Young Generation with Solidarity Through *Sradha* (faith) and *Bhakti* (devotion) and Upholding the Noble Values of Peace', provides education and training for students. The retreat includes Hindu religious education and enhances solidarity among the Hindu community in response to globalisation. Students receive basic leadership training and learn values of cohesiveness and tolerance in religious life—values not often covered in formal education. These activities aim to produce well-rounded students equipped for social life and to strengthen networks among students, advancing Hindu religious activities and promoting peace.

The success of *Pasraman Astika Siddhi* reflects Klaten Hindu Dharma College's commitment to fostering peace within a pluralistic campus environment. This programme's impact is underscored by the enthusiasm and dedication of the academic community. As stated by Faturosi, a faculty member, this programme provides each student with essential skills and insights into interfaith relations (Faturosi, Personal Communication, 2022). Similarly, Galuh observed that this annual event helps students apply the teachings on peace emphasised during the retreat (Galuh, Personal Communication, 2022).

In addition to *Pasraman Astika Siddhi*, several non-official programmes support the College's peace-building efforts. These include blood donation drives, community service, social assistance, youth exchanges, temple tours, and collaboration with local churches. These non-official programmes are carried out

in cooperation with external organisations, such as the Indonesian Red Cross, the Christian Church of Hope, and the interfaith harmony forum.

The blood donation programme, an example of a non-official peace-building initiative, fosters collaboration between Klaten Hindu Dharma College and the Indonesian Red Cross (*Palang Merah Indonesia*). According to Galuh, this programme encourages students to share virtues within a framework of brotherhood and peace (Galuh, Personal Communication, 2022). Other non-official programmes include temple tours and community service, both of which allow the College to engage with the local community. As Dewayanti described, the temple tour programme includes dialogues on religion and peace with nearby communities every two months (Dewayanti, Personal Communication, 2022).

The community service programme, another component of peace-building, involves teaching and providing resources to surrounding communities. Topics covered in community service include interfaith harmony and tolerance in social life (Dewayanti, Personal Communication, 2022). Further initiatives include food distribution, fundraising for disaster relief, and youth exchange programmes. These efforts strengthen relationships between Hindu students and other religious groups. For instance, Nara mentioned that the food distribution programme builds a sense of kinship, promoting harmony in daily life (Nara, Personal Communication, 2022).

Another peace-building initiative includes fundraising for disaster relief, which the College routinely conducts when disasters occur. This programme is a humanitarian effort carried out by students, regardless of the religious affiliation of those affected. Nara explained that their most recent fundraising helped flood victims in Cawas and Bayat, including individuals of various faiths (Nara, Personal Communication, 2022).

The flagship youth exchange programme is particularly notable. While typically a Hindu-centric activity, this programme involves visiting churches and mosques, where students participate in a comparative study to foster goodwill and harmony. Nara remarked that the programme demonstrates the College's dedication to teaching values of mutual respect and peace among diverse religious groups (Nara, Personal Communication, 2022).

The peace-building model at Klaten Hindu Dharma College aligns with Abu Nimer's essential peace-building values (Abu-Nimer, 2003). The first value, justice, reflects the belief that everyone has the right to peace and tranquillity. The second, community empowerment, is evident in the College's social activities, which encourage community-led peace-building initiatives. The third essential value, human dignity, emphasises respecting, valuing, and honouring human rights. This principle is ingrained in *bina damai* (peace-building) programmes that promote compassion and equality. Finally, solidarity and collective action are fundamental, as peace cannot be achieved without a sense of shared purpose and responsible cooperation (Mulyatno, 2015). The blood donation programme exemplifies this value, symbolising shared attitudes between students and the community in maintaining health and solidarity.

## **2. Evaluating the Effectiveness of Peace-Building Programmes in Preventing Conflict and Violence**

The peace-building programme model organised by Klaten Hindu Dharma College serves as a meaningful effort in preventing conflict and violence, especially given that the campus is located in an area prone to such issues. Various peace-building programmes have been held through collaboration between the academic community and external institutions, aiming to instil values of peace and harmony among religious communities. This section describes the observations on the effectiveness of these programmes in promoting peace and preventing conflict.

The programmes implemented by Hindu Dharma College appear to be effective in maintaining peace and preventing violence. Angki, a participant, described his experience as one that brought a “fresh air” of peace and harmony, evidenced by the absence of conflict between students and the surrounding community during the programme (Angki, Personal Communication, 2022). From this, it can be concluded that these programmes have strengthened communication between students and the local community. As noted by Nara, Hindu Dharma College establishes contact with local leaders, such as the heads of *RT* (Rukun Tetangga, neighbourhood association) and *RW* (Rukun Warga, community association), to seek permission and support for smooth programme execution (Nara, Personal Communication, 2022).

This support is echoed by the community’s positive response to the College’s initiatives, which are seen as fostering a peaceful social environment. Dedo, a student who moved to the Klaten area, mentioned feeling comfortable and at peace, though minor internal conflicts sometimes arose among committee members due to differing viewpoints (Dedo, Personal Communication, 2022). Community acceptance and respect for people with different beliefs further validate the programme’s success. Ardiansyah, for example, expressed that the local community respects religious differences and is supportive of the College’s initiatives, including blood donation drives (Ardiansyah, Personal Communication, 2022). Galuh also stated that community members participate actively and enthusiastically in these events (Galuh, Personal Communication, 2022). Berli similarly expressed his enthusiasm for these peace-building activities, noting how they promote harmony in social life (Berli, Personal Communication, 2022).

Based on field observations and interviews, the *bina damai* (peace-building) programme model at Klaten Hindu Dharma College appears to effectively reduce conflict and violence within and around the campus. These programmes have a positive impact by strengthening peace values and interfaith harmony in an area vulnerable to conflict.

Another benefit of the peace-building programmes at Hindu Dharma College is the fostering of close relationships with members of different religious communities. Talang observed that the programmes promote religious awareness; for instance, when Hindus are praying, Christians who are rehearsing their choir consciously lower their voices, and vice versa (Talang, Personal Communication, 2022). This mutual respect highlights the commitment of both communities to maintaining a respectful worship environment. This relationship has led to Hindu Dharma College being invited to seminars and talks, such as those hosted by the

*FKUB* (Religious Harmony Forum), aimed at reinforcing tolerance values (Faturosi, Personal Communication, 2022).

Moreover, the College's peace-building programmes have positively influenced cooperation with various social groups. For instance, in times of disaster, Hindu Dharma College often sends volunteers to aid those affected. Farida shared that the College's volunteers assist during natural disasters, reinforcing the community bond through humanitarian acts (Farida, Personal Communication, 2022). These efforts illustrate how the peace-building programmes cultivate mutual respect, strengthen community ties, and foster an environment of tolerance and social responsibility.

### **3. Insights from the Peace-Building Programme at Klaten Hindu Dharma College**

This study examined the peace-building programmes implemented by Klaten Hindu Dharma College, with a focus on official and non-official activities aimed at fostering interfaith harmony, respect, and community solidarity. Key findings indicated that programmes like *Pasraman Astika Siddhi* (a Hindu retreat), blood donation drives, and youth exchanges play a significant role in maintaining peace and reducing potential conflicts within and around the campus. By promoting values of respect, mutual tolerance, and collaboration with other religious groups, these programmes have strengthened inter-community relationships and enhanced social harmony.

The success of these peace-building initiatives lies in their rootedness in both Hindu teachings and local cultural values, which emphasise mutual respect and community engagement. The approach of integrating activities such as community service and interfaith interactions taps into core societal principles of tolerance and cooperation. Additionally, the involvement of community leaders in planning and supporting these initiatives likely reinforced their effectiveness, as it provided local support and alignment with community needs and values.

In line with previous research, this study affirms that religious institutions can play a vital role in peace-building by creating structured programmes to bridge gaps between different religious groups (Mantu, 2015; Rahmat, 2015). However, this research brings novelty by specifically analysing peace-building within an educational setting, highlighting the role of Hindu educational institutions in a pluralistic context. Previous studies have largely focused on peace-building among the general public, whereas this study underscores the unique role that religious colleges can play in fostering peace from an early educational level.

This study reaffirms that religious institutions play a crucial role in peace-building by using structured programmes to bridge divides between various religious groups. This aligns with case studies that illustrate religious institutions' contributions to peace-building across diverse contexts. For instance, the mediation and reconciliation roles of religious leaders, as observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, leverage their moral authority to facilitate dialogue during conflict and support post-conflict reconciliation efforts (Odak, 2021). Similarly, Christian churches in South Africa empower communities by promoting anti-violence strategies and psycho-social healing, despite recognising the need for more comprehensive approaches to tackle systemic violence (Clark, 2011).



The findings from this study highlight significant socio-cultural and ideological implications for peace-building in educational and religious contexts. The peace-building model at Klaten Hindu Dharma College demonstrates how values embedded in Hindu teachings, such as respect, tolerance, and community solidarity, can transcend religious boundaries to foster interfaith harmony. This suggests that when educational institutions incorporate peace-building activities rooted in local and cultural values, they contribute to broader social stability and resilience against potential conflicts. Ideologically, this model reinforces the notion that religion, when applied constructively, can be a powerful medium for promoting peace, challenging the notion that religious differences are inherently divisive. The integration of structured, values-based programmes within an educational setting provides a replicable framework for other institutions to foster harmony in pluralistic societies.

In Indonesia, religious institutions not only play a role in community empowerment but also serve as early warning systems against emerging conflicts, given their integration and influence within local communities (Silaeva, 2022). This study contributes a unique perspective by focusing on Hindu Dharma College's peace-building initiatives within an educational setting, demonstrating how such institutions can foster interfaith harmony from a young age through immersive, values-based programmes. This approach contrasts with many previous studies centred on peace-building in general community contexts, highlighting the potential for religious colleges to cultivate peace-building practices early in life and strengthen tolerance through sustained interfaith interactions.

Moreover, Hindu Dharma College's efforts resonate with findings from the Democratic Republic of Congo, where religious institutions engage with both grassroots and leadership levels, underscoring the importance of involving all societal strata in peace-building (Alfani, 2019). While prior studies indicate that religious institutions can be ambivalent forces in peace-building, both promoting and potentially exacerbating conflicts (Katano, 2009; Kilonzo, 2023), this study suggests that educational institutions grounded in religious teachings, such as Hindu Dharma College, can balance these dual roles effectively. By incorporating structured programmes and aligning with essential values of justice, community empowerment, and solidarity, these institutions may offer a replicable model for sustainable peace-building that addresses the complexities of religion's role in both conflict and peace.

This research offers insights into both the functional and potential dysfunctional aspects of implementing peace-building programmes in religious educational institutions. Functionally, the programmes have proven effective in promoting tolerance, respect, and cooperation among students and the local community, fostering an atmosphere of mutual understanding. The study underscores the importance of actively engaging community leaders and external stakeholders, which has contributed to the programme's success and positive reception. However, some challenges were noted, such as minor conflicts within programme committees due to differing opinions. These internal disagreements suggest that while peace-building efforts can be unifying, they also require strong

organisational skills, effective communication, and conflict-resolution capabilities among coordinators to address potential discord.

To enhance the positive impact of peace-building initiatives in religious educational institutions, several policy actions are recommended. First, educational authorities should consider formally integrating peace-building into the curriculum, allowing students to develop skills in tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and social cohesion from an early age. Training in conflict resolution and leadership could be offered to programme organisers to minimise internal conflicts and ensure the smooth execution of initiatives. Additionally, fostering partnerships with local interfaith organisations, such as the *FKUB* (Religious Harmony Forum), could help expand these programmes' reach and effectiveness. These initiatives collectively underscore the potential for religious educational institutions to serve as vital agents of peace-building, offering a model that can be adapted and implemented across diverse communities.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the concept of understanding peace adopted by the academic community of the Hindu Dharma College of Klaten comes from Hindu teachings such as Tri Hita Karana (three causes of happiness), Sad Ripu (the concept of overcoming oneself), and Trikaya Parisuda (three concepts of maintaining actions, words, and thoughts). As according to Mukti Ali, peace will be created when religious adherents believe that their teachings are true and also allow adherents of other religions to believe that their teachings are also true. This understanding is known as agree in disagreement. In practice, the peacebuilding program is applied by the Hindu Dharma College in the form of Pasraman Astika Siddhi, blood donor programs, touring temples, community service, social services such as fundraising and youth exchange programs. These programs are carried out by the Hindu Dharma College in order to foster an attitude of mutual tolerance, respect, and respect for other religious communities. The peacebuilding program organized by the Hindu Dharma College has had a significant impact, namely successfully preventing conflict and violence in an environment that is known to be prone to religious conflict. In other words, it can be said that the peacebuilding programs organized by the Hindu Dharma College are able to create peace and harmony between religious communities through cooperation between academics and the local community. So that it brings a positive impact, namely the creation of values of peace and tolerance.

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