

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' RELIGIOUS MODERATION THROUGH GROUP COUNSELING AT ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Tolerance in social life is a need for Indonesian citizens. However, cases of intolerance and violence in the name of religion frequently occur in social life and might influence students at university. This research aims to assess the level of religious moderation comprehension among students at UIN (*Universitas Islam Negeri*/State Islamic University) Suska Riau through group counseling sessions. The study utilized a quantitative approach, employing a descriptive pre-experimental Intack Group Comparison design. The findings revealed that students' understanding of a moderate attitude significantly increased after participating in group counseling on moderation, with a positive score of 97.5% and a negative score of 2.4%. The inclusion of religious moderation as a theme in group counseling positively impacted students' comprehension and attitude towards religious moderation within society. Notably, two indicators, national commitment and tolerance, exhibited the most significant improvements, with respective increases of 35% and 29%. These results suggest that employing group counseling centered around religious moderation can serve as a model for enhancing students' understanding of religious moderation in society.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Moderate Attitude, Group Counseling, Tolerance

ABSTRAK

Kehidupan toleran merupakan tuntutan masyarakat Indonesia sehari-hari. Namun, dalam realitasnya banyak terjadi kasus tindak kekerasan dan intoleransi atas nama agama di kalangan masyarakat yang dapat berpengaruh bagi para mahasiswa. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengukur pemahaman moderasi beragama mahasiswa melalui grup konseling di UIN Suska Riau. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif melalui rancangan deskriptif pre-experimental Intack Group Comparison. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, sikap moderat mahasiswa sebelum diberikan bimbingan kelompok bertema moderasi dikategorikan tinggi dengan skor 97,5% positif dan 2,4% negatif. Bimbingan kelompok bertema moderasi beragama dapat meningkatkan pemahaman mahasiswa tentang sikap moderat dalam masyarakat. Indikator komitmen kebangsaan dan toleransi menjadi indikator dominan meningkat masing-masing 35% dan 29% dari total empat indikator yang ditingkatkan. Implikasi penelitian ini, bimbingan kelompok bertema moderasi beragama dapat dijadikan model dalam meningkatkan pemahaman mahasiswa tentang moderasi beragama dalam masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Moderasi Beragama, Sikap Moderat, Konseling Kelompok, Toleransi

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, being a diverse nation, necessitates its inhabitants to foster mutual understanding, acceptance, and tolerance in their daily interactions (Indriastuti & Mustikawati, 2021; Pangalila et al., 2020). This concept is referred to as having a moderate approach within society. It entails citizens not clashing with one another's religious values, recognizing the cultural richness stemming from religious differences, and refraining from engaging in extreme religious practices in social life. This notion is known as religious moderation, which involves comprehending and embracing religious teachings in a balanced manner to prevent excessive and extreme behavior (Alam, 2020; Alshehri et al., 2020)

Religious moderation has several challenges and one of them is extreme religious attitude. Extreme refers to the utmost level, the most intense, the loudest, the most unwavering, and the fanatical (Jamarudin et al., 2022; Rossi, 2020). Having an extreme attitude implies a tendency to disregard legal principles and reject diversity (Blair, 2019; Bugaric & Kuhelj, 2018; Davies, 2018). The consequence of such extreme attitudes and thoughts manifests as radical behavior (Götzsche-Astrup, 2018; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020).

In recent times, several instances of extreme acts have frequently been associated with the religious beliefs of the perpetrators. For instance, there was the bombing of a church in Sangkotek, East Kalimantan on November 13, 2016, which was carried out by a terrorist (Juliawanti, 2018). Additionally, incidents involving attacks on Islamic clerics have circulated on social media. According to research conducted by the Setara Institute in 2020, there were at least 422 incidents in Indonesia that violated religious freedom (Indrayanti & Saraswati, 2022; Kasim & Wickens, 2020; Simandjuntak, 2021). These cases included 62 instances of intolerance, 32 cases of blasphemy, 17 cases of refusal to construct places of worship, and 8 cases of disrupting worship activities (Hart, 2018; Rogers, 2018).

Intolerance and radicalism incidents are frequently linked to the religious affiliation of the perpetrators rather than their individual characteristics. However, this perspective is flawed because religion should promote virtue and benevolence among its followers. In order to prevent social misconceptions, intolerance, and extreme behavior in religious practices, it is essential to cultivate an understanding of religious moderation from a young age. This endeavor should not be limited to specific religions but should involve all religious communities in Indonesia. Educational institutions are one of the key institutions that can play a crucial role in enhancing comprehension of religious moderation

The research findings indicate that students' comprehension of moderation has improved through the implementation of group counseling activities, particularly those emphasizing religious moderation. To gain deeper insights into how students develop their

understanding and promote the concept of religious moderation through group counseling, this study aimed to explore these areas. Additionally, this research demonstrated that addressing individual concerns of participants within thematic group therapy could influence the desired outcome of fostering a moderate attitude in society. The study revealed that group counseling materials on moderation positively influenced the moderate attitudes of students, as evidenced by indicators such as national commitment and tolerance among PTKIN (Islamic Higher Education Institutions) students in society.

Numerous studies have previously examined the use of group counseling, with a focus on various outcomes. However, this study specifically concentrates on the effects of utilizing group counseling on students' autonomy (Wulandari et al., 2020; Levy & Travis, 2020; Farozin et al., 2020). Other studies have explored group counseling techniques to assist individuals with learning difficulties in completing coursework, enhancing motivation for studying, fostering discipline, and so on (Sari et al., 2020; Nurhayati, 2020). Previous research has also investigated the efficacy of reality group therapy in promoting academic responsibility among students (Juita et al., 2020; Corey et al., 2020; Metcalf, 2021). Nevertheless, there remains a gap in research when it comes to comprehensively examining the process of understanding student moderation through the use of group counseling.

This research aims to gain a deeper understanding of how students develop their understanding of the subject matter and how the concept of religious moderation can be integrated through counseling groups. It also highlights that by addressing individual conflicts within participants, themed counseling groups have the potential to influence the desired outcome, which is cultivating a moderate attitude in society. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that group counseling materials focused on moderation have a positive impact on students' moderate attitudes.

Exploring this service is highly recommended to enhance students' comprehension of religious moderation, personal growth and resolving issues arising from a lack of understanding in this area. The welcoming environment and interactive dynamics fostered by the service are expected to foster a sense of enjoyment and openness, encouraging members to freely express their thoughts and ideas. The values of moderation are believed to be best understood through active participation in group counseling.

Grasping the principles of religious moderation enables individuals to exhibit moderation in their interactions within society. This represents the desired outcome of endeavors aimed at enhancing understanding of moderate attitudes in society. The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to depict students' comprehension of moderate attitudes in society before and after participating in group counseling, (2) to examine students' attitudes towards followers of different religions, (3) to explore the effectiveness of group counseling centered on religious moderation in enhancing students' understanding of moderate attitudes in society, and (4) to identify indicators of improvement following group counseling focused on religious moderation.

This study aims to enhance our comprehension of students' understanding of religious moderation specifically at UIN Suska Riau. The research findings are expected to serve as a foundation for the development of more effective educational and counseling programs that promote a deeper understanding and foster a positive attitude towards religious moderation among university students. By focusing on the context of UIN Suska Riau, this research endeavors to make a valuable contribution to strengthening students' comprehension of religious moderation. Furthermore, the findings will provide insights for the development of pertinent policies and programs within UIN Suska Riau.

METHOD

The study encompassed a population of 26,972 students from UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. Non-probability sampling was employed, specifically the Convenience Sampling method, to select the participants based on the desired criteria and their voluntary willingness to take part in the study (Cresswell, 2015). The sample criteria required students to complete the pre-test and express their willingness to participate. Following the guidelines for group counseling implementation, an ideal group size would consist of 8-10 individuals. During the screening phase, 700 pre-test questionnaires were distributed, out of which 411 were returned, and 205 students confirmed their readiness to participate in the research. Consequently, the study proceeded with 100 individuals in the experimental group and 105 individuals in the control group. Closed questionnaires were utilized to collect the research data.

The research data was gathered using a closed questionnaire that employed a five-point response scale. For positive statements, the response options were categorized as follows: "Strongly agree" with a score of 5, "Agree" with a score of 4, "Disagree" with scores of 3 and 2, and "Strongly disagree" with a score of 1. Conversely, for negative statements, the response options were reversed: "Strongly agree" with a score of 1, "Agree" with a score of 2, "Disagree" with scores of 3 and 4, and "Strongly disagree" with a score of 5 (Loomis & Paterson, 2018).

The indicators used to measure religious moderation in this study encompassed the following aspects: (1) national commitment, (2) tolerance, (3) non-violence, and 4) acceptance of tradition. Prior to data collection, the research instrument underwent validity and reliability testing. All statement items were found to be in the valid category (with values greater than 0.361 for all items, at both the 1% and 5% significance levels). The reliability test yielded a result of 0.757, indicating that the research instrument is reliable (Rahima & Herlinda, 2017).

This study employs a quantitative approach, utilizing two designs: descriptive analysis (percentage and categorization) and the pre-experimental Intack Group Comparison method (Barida et al., 2019). The population is divided into two groups for comparison. One group receives a specific treatment while the other does not, allowing for the examination of differences in students' understanding of moderate attitudes in society. The Mann-Whitney U test is conducted to analyze the differences between pre-test and post-test scores among the research subjects. The categorization process, as suggested by Andrich & Marais (2019), involves grouping individuals based on measured attributes along a continuum. The data range or interval can be calculated using the formula proposed by Cai & He (2019). To test the research hypothesis, the non-parametric statistical analysis technique of Mann-Whitney U test is employed. This test is suitable when the researcher wants to determine if there are significant differences in conditions after specific treatments, even when the data is not normally distributed. SPSS (Statistical Program for Social Sciences) 20.00 is used to perform the Mann-Whitney U test in order to avoid calculation errors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, explanation of students' comprehension of moderate attitudes in society prior to and following group counseling will be described.

Table 1. Students' Understanding of Moderate Attitudes in Society Before and After Control Class Group Counseling

Data Group	Categorization	F <i>Pre-test</i>	F <i>Post-test</i>
156-185	Very high	44	49
126-155	Tall	61	56
96-125	Currently	1	0
66-95	Low	0	0

Data Group	Categorization	F <i>Pre-test</i>	F <i>Post-test</i>
36-65	Very low	0	0
Means Score		154.42	156.89

Table 2. Students' Understanding of Moderate Attitudes in Society Before and After Experimental Class Group Counseling

Data Group	Categorization	F <i>Pre-test</i>	F <i>Post-test</i>
156-185	Very high	42	46
126-155	Tall	58	54
96-125	Currently	0	0
66-95	Low	0	0
36-65	Very low	0	0
Means Score		156.2	158.84

The majority of students 97.5% demonstrate a strong positive attitude towards followers of other religions. However, a small percentage of students 2.4% still hold negative attitudes towards followers of other religions. These attitudes, whether positive or negative, stem from a variety of underlying understandings. The following provides an overview of the students' perspectives, which contribute to their positive attitudes towards individuals practicing different religions:

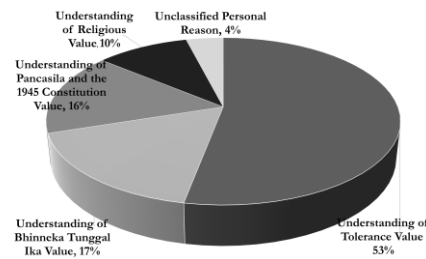


Figure 1. Factors Contributing to Students' Positive Attitudes Towards Individuals Of Different Religions

Figure 1. illustrates the factors contributing to students' positive attitudes towards individuals of different religions. The diagram highlights that the majority of positive attitudes (53%) are motivated by an understanding of the importance of tolerance. This is followed by an appreciation for the value of unity in diversity, understanding of the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, recognition of religious values, and other unspecified reasons. Conversely, the diagram also presents the factors driving students' negative attitudes, providing insight into their underlying motivations

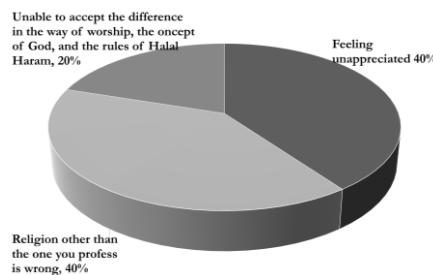


Figure 2. Factors Underlying Students' Negative Attitudes Towards Individuals Practicing Different Religions

Figure 2. depicts the factors underlying students' negative attitudes towards individuals practicing different religions. The findings of this study reveal that a significant portion of these negative attitudes is driven by beliefs. Specifically, the assumption that religions other

than one's own are erroneous has led to a negative perception of followers of other faiths. Additionally, differences in worship practices, concepts of God, and regulations regarding what is permissible (halal) and prohibited (haram) have also contributed to the emergence of negative attitudes towards individuals practicing different religions.

Table 3. Mann Whitney Test

Understanding of Moderate Attitude	
Mann-Whitney U	480.000
Wilcoxon W	1146.000
Z	-1.893
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.058

Figure 3. shows a Visual Representation Showcasing the Upward Trend of The Indicators:

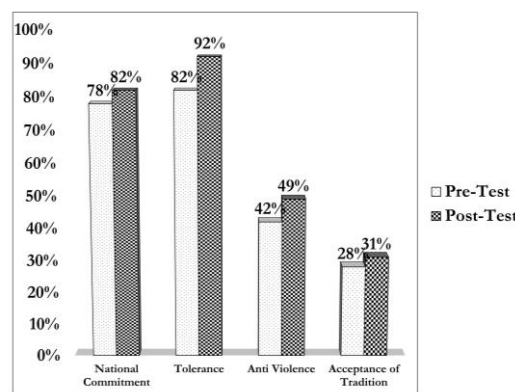


Figure 3. Increasing Indicators

Based on the pre-test results, it is evident that there is a notable distinction in students' understanding before and after participating in group counseling centered around religious moderation. This disparity in comprehension between the two groups indicates a positive development. The control group exhibited an increase in understanding, transitioning from a frequency of 44 to 49 in the very high category. Similarly, the experimental group displayed an initial frequency of 42 to 46 in the very high category. These findings signify a significant variance in pre-test and post-test scores within the very high category for both groups. Both the control and experimental groups demonstrated a consistently high level of understanding regarding moderate attitudes both prior to and after engaging in group counseling focused on religious moderation.

According to the findings obtained from the research instrument, students' attitudes towards individuals practicing different religions within society were found to be predominantly positive, accounting for 97.8%. This favorable attitude is influenced by various factors, including:

Understanding the Tolerance Values

The primary factor motivating the majority of research participants to exhibit moderate attitudes in society is tolerance. A significant portion, accounting for 53% of the subjects, believes in respecting and appreciating everyone's right to practice their religion. This observation indicates that the positive stance of UIN Suska Riau students regarding interreligious relationships reflects the values of tolerance they have previously embraced. Findings from the pre-test revealed that 80.4% of the participants had previous experiences of living in a community comprising individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. Additionally, 97.5% of the 205 research subjects reported never having encountered conflicts

with people practicing different religions. These results demonstrate the openness of UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau students, who served as the research subjects, towards individuals of other religious beliefs.

A profound comprehension of the importance of tolerance enables religious practitioners to foster peace within their nation and state. The occurrence of numerous incidents of intolerance does not necessarily indicate the prevalence of intolerance and conservatism in religious beliefs (Holmes, 2021; Wolloch, 2022; Saltelli et al., 2019).

Understanding the Values of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika

The positive attitude of the research subjects is shaped by their understanding of the values of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. A significant portion (17%) of the research subjects perceives the diversity of ethnicity, race, religion, belief, and tradition as a national asset. This understanding aligns with the nation's aspiration to make Bhinneka Tunggal Ika the unifying motto of the country.

Indonesia has successfully achieved national unity by integrating various ethnic groups, races, religions, beliefs, and traditions into a cohesive entity (Aulia et al., 2021; Isra & Tegnan, 2021; Pranata et al., 2020). In contrast, several countries, such as Sri Lanka (Firman, 2022) and America (Santosa, 2021), have struggled with ongoing racial and intolerant conflicts for centuries. Although incidents of intolerance and radicalism still occur in Indonesia, it is important to recognize that diversity can be both a source of richness and a potential trigger for conflicts (Bacher & Scheffold, 2018; Isra & Tegnan, 2021). Therefore, diversity should not be merely understood as a nation comprising various tribes, races, religions, beliefs, and traditions, but rather as a driving force to build a great nation that is united, peaceful, and open to embracing differences.

Understanding the Values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution

The research subjects' positive attitude was influenced by their understanding of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, accounting for 16% of the overall influence. This is evident from the research subjects' responses, where they perceive the relationships among religious communities as differences that should be respected, as these differences are regulated and protected by the state.

The Constitution, specifically Article 29 Paragraphs 1 and 2, provides a framework for addressing religious differences in Indonesia (Asmara, 2018; Ichsan & Prasetyoningsih, 2020; Khalimy, 2020). It guarantees religious freedom for all Indonesian citizens, emphasizing the importance of upholding the noble values of Pancasila, which prioritize the sacredness of life and ensure that worship is conducted in a fair and civilized manner. By strengthening the understanding of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, the promotion of religious moderation can be pursued effectively.

Understanding the Adopted Religious Values

The understanding of religious values contributes to 10% of the research subjects' positive attitudes towards inter-religious relations. It is important to note that all research subjects in this study are Muslims, so the focus is on exploring the value of Islamic teachings regarding religious moderation.

Islam is recognized as a comprehensive and inclusive religion that has embraced openness since its inception. Historical accounts highlight instances of coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslims in Medina during the hijrah. The development of the caliphate and Islamic empire further exemplify how non-Muslim residents were able to practice their own faith safely and peacefully in accordance with their beliefs. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between moderate Islam and Islamic moderation. Islam itself does not require moderation, as it is already complete and perfect in its teachings (Qasim et al., 2021; Rawwas

et al., 2018; Sani & Ekowati, 2020). There are no categorizations or divisions within Islam such as "moderate Islam," "extreme Islam," or similar terms.

Closed-mindedness and a distorted interpretation of religious teachings contribute to the emergence of extremist groups (Mosley et al., 2020; Whitehouse, 2018). It is important to note that such factors can lead to the formation of extreme groups among adherents of any religion, not exclusively Islam. To foster peaceful coexistence among religious communities, it is crucial to promote religious moderation, which entails seeking a balanced approach, avoiding extremism, and embracing religious diversity.

In the context of UIN Suska as an Islamic educational institution, Islamic values have been integrated into the curriculum in a comprehensive manner. These values are evident in the academic environment, the teaching and learning process, as well as the curriculum itself (RPS). The academic environment reflects Islamic influences, such as students and lecturers dressed in attire with Islamic nuances. Furthermore, the learning activities commence with prayers, and the graduation requirements include the memorization of juz 30 (a section of the Quran). These efforts aim to instill in students an understanding of peaceful and harmonious Islamic values.

Furthermore, alongside the integration of Islamic values, UIN Suska's curriculum also includes the incorporation of national values through Pancasila courses and citizenship education. Additionally, the institution actively commemorates significant national events to foster a sense of nationalism and patriotism among students. These collective efforts aim to cultivate a comprehensive understanding of both Islamic and national values among the student body.

In this study, it was also revealed that, in addition to positive attitudes, some students hold negative views towards individuals from different religious communities. A small portion of students expressed a sense of being unappreciated, which stems from the perception of unequal recognition during the celebration of Muslim holidays. Additionally, the negative attitudes of students are driven by the belief that religions other than their own are inherently incorrect.

The belief that religions other than one's own are incorrect is an intrinsic part of one's *aqidah*, as long as it does not lead to intolerant behavior. In essence, maintaining the belief that Allah is the only God to be worshipped represents the true *aqidah*, while accepting all religions would imply a lack of *aqidah*. However, in Islam, it is imperative not to hinder others from worshipping God according to their own religious teachings, as affirmed by Allah in Surah Al-Kafirun 1-6. Therefore, in everyday life, it is crucial to avoid displaying hostility and to view differences as a cause for division.

Erroneous thoughts that may foster division need to be rectified. It is obligatory to practice one's own religion appropriately. In addition, respecting individuals of other religions is essential for harmonious coexistence in Indonesia. Radical and extreme ideologies should not be allowed to thrive and grow, as evidenced by the detrimental consequences arising from the inability of certain hardline groups to accept differences, such as the Aceh conflict (2015), Poso conflict (2000, 2016), Tanjung Balai conflict (2016), and Sampang conflict (Mahadi, 2022).

This research contributes by providing a method for cultivating a moderate attitude through group counseling. It is hoped that individuals who interact with people of diverse religious backgrounds can maintain their attitudes and refrain from fostering hostility and division based on these differences. Every believer is obliged to adhere to the principles of their respective religions without engaging in extreme behavior towards followers of other religions (Khan et al., 2020; Yew et al., 2021).

Group Counseling Services with the Theme of Religious Moderation to Increase Students' Understanding of Moderate Attitudes in Society

The results of the Mann Whitney test on the pre-test and post-test, with a significance value of 0.036 (which is lower than 0.05), indicate that the null hypothesis (H₀) is accepted. Therefore, it can be concluded that group counseling with a focus on religious moderation has the ability to enhance students' comprehension of moderate attitudes within society. The specific indicators that witnessed improvement in this study are as Figure 4.

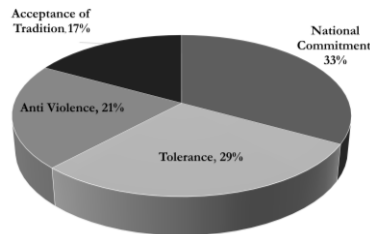


Figure 4. The increase of Students' Understanding of Moderate Attitudes in Society

Figure 4 demonstrates the increase in the indicator of national commitment, which amounts to 33%. National commitment signifies the understanding among the Indonesian people regarding Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution and their role in achieving the goal of unity and cohesion within the Republic of Indonesia. This commitment addresses various aspects, such as the anthropological, philosophical, legal, psychological, ideological, and strategic aspects of the archipelago (Sumada, 2018).

Preserving the unity and integrity of the Republic of Indonesia, encompassing its diverse nature, is undoubtedly a challenging task. To tackle this, religious individuals have at least three responsibilities (Argenti et al., 2022; Nguitragool, 2020; Saidek et al., 2016). Firstly, they must uphold religious principles and put them into practice, especially by prioritizing the respect and dignity of every human being. Adhering to true teachings will prevent the adoption of extreme behaviors that undermine human dignity.

The second responsibility entails managing the diversity of religious interpretations stemming from the pluralistic nature of the Indonesian people. It involves avoiding subjective truths that are sometimes influenced by political and group interests. Instead, religious interpretations should be directed towards the intellectual exploration of religion's principles and teachings. Thirdly, every religious community is obligated and committed to upholding the unity and integrity of the Republic of Indonesia, fostering a sense of national identity and patriotism that transcends religious and ethnic differences (Harahap et al., 2019, 2022; Ishak et al., 2022).

In addition, the non-violence indicator witnessed a 21% increase. Non-violence refers to the rejection of both physical and mental acts of violence employed by individuals or groups in pursuit of desired changes (Harahap et al., 2019). Acts of violence are often carried out to gain power or emerge victorious in a conflict. Many interreligious conflicts have resulted in numerous casualties and caused physical and psychological harm to individuals. Closed-minded and extreme individuals resort to violence to impose their thoughts or beliefs on others or their group. For instance, the ongoing wars in various Middle Eastern countries are driven by political interests and differences in religious understanding. Hence, one of the indicators of successful inculcation of moderate values is an increase in the non-violence indicator (Nurfaizah, 2019; Bell & Flood, 2020; Prasetyo et al., 2020). The greater one's understanding of non-violence, the more likely it is to foster peace among religious communities.

The indicator that has shown the least increase, at 17%, is the acceptance of tradition. Nevertheless, this increase is still considered positive. Tradition is inherently resistant to change due to its close connection with individuals' life experiences and upbringing. It is not easily altered within a relatively short period of time. Traditions gradually evolve into customs that shape a person's personality, character, and subsequently influence their beliefs and worship of God.

Worship practices closely tied to tradition often elicit both positive and negative reactions. Some societal groups perceive certain traditional rituals as deviant or even as acts of polytheism (*musrik*) that must be eradicated. For instance, a recent incident involved a man kicking an offering on Mount Semeru Lumajang, which he claimed was inviting God's wrath, as depicted in a viral social media video (Prihartini, 2022). This incident garnered widespread negative feedback from the general public. Many commenters regarded the act of kicking the offering as an act of arrogance, intolerance, and a violation of customs.

The education received by UIN Suska Riau students, spanning from elementary school to university, has instilled in them the values of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. The values they received in turn shape their attitudes towards fostering inter-religious relations. This is evidenced by the fact that 56% of the research subjects have never encountered conflicts with individuals from different religious backgrounds, while 73.6% have coexisted harmoniously with people of diverse religious beliefs. The strong sense of national commitment among UIN Suska Riau students serves as an asset for the state's efforts in promoting religious moderation.

Furthermore, the aspiration for a greater nation, characterized by safety and peace, is also integrated into the guidance and counseling provided by teachers at elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. These guidance and counseling teachers play a crucial role and possess expertise in implementing group counseling sessions, employing framing techniques and general strategies, all aimed at reinforcing the moderate values among religious students across Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, some conclusions can be drawn. Prior to receiving group counseling with a focus on moderation, students at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau exhibited a generally high level of moderate attitude, with their scores showing an increase but not reaching the very high category. Their attitudes towards adherents of other religions were predominantly positive, with 97.5% displaying a positive attitude and only 2.4% holding negative views. The results of the Mann Whitney test indicated a significant improvement, with a Sig. value of $0.036 < 0.05$. This leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H_0), demonstrating that group counseling centered on religious moderation has the ability to enhance students' understanding of moderate attitudes in society. The indicators of national commitment and tolerance emerged as the dominant factors contributing to the increase, accounting for 35% and 29% of the total improvement across the four indicators, respectively. Group counseling, characterized by its direct focus on addressing problems, its high social value, and its dynamic nature that facilitates learning among members, has proven to be effective in enhancing students' comprehension of moderate attitudes at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, employing both specialized and general techniques.

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