

Navigating Diversity and Tolerance in Higher Education and Insights from East Nusa Tenggara Province

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Abstract. The rise of religious, cultural, and ideological intolerance, prejudice, and discrimination on university campuses is a major educational challenge. This research suggests ways universities might manage diversity and promote tolerance and multiculturalism on and off campus. The paper uses successful East Nusa Tenggara community and university diversity management and tolerance initiatives to explain these strategies. Qualitative research included a literature review and Focus Group Discussions on 12 East Nusa Tenggara universities. As convergence locations for intellectuals from varied religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds, colleges must become diverse, tolerant, inclusive, and multicultural. The study shows that East Nusa Tenggara campuses have managed diversity and promoted tolerance well, serving as models for other communities.

Keywords: Tolerance; Pluralism; Higher Education; Multiculturalism; East Nusa Tenggara

1 Introduction

Modern cultures are more open and complicated. This is seen in increased mobility and encounters. These personal interactions combine individual beliefs and identities, creating varied, multi-polar, and heterogeneous social units. Feldstein in Yusopova [1] proposes that socio-cultural and living environment changes can test “people’s patience”. Diversity requires the ability to manage differences, ensure personal safety and comfort in a diversified setting, and appreciate others' values.

Research shows that diversity management does not evolve naturally. Sakalii et al. [2], William [3], Shen [4], and UNESCO [5] agree that diversity education requires considerable consideration and well-designed techniques. This subject has been studied extensively for policy analysis [6], pedagogy [7], and awareness [8]. Some studies examine government [9] [10], stakeholders, and other topics.

This study adds by examining how Indonesian higher education manages diversity and promotes tolerance. Indonesian universities are places of human encounters with diverse ideals and identities. Given Indonesia's religious, ethnic, language, cultural, and other diversity, these schools serve as a microcosm of the country, attracting students and faculty from all around. This diversity helps higher education institutions provide a secure space, promote tolerance and multiculturalism, and model heterogeneous social units.

Unfortunately, university campuses have seen intolerant movements. This is supported by recent Indonesian academic research by Suyatno [11], Sirry and Sugiharti [12], Sirry [13], Nafi'a, et al. [14], Achmad, Harahap, Ishan [15], Purwasih and Widiyanto [16], and Achmad [17]. Mietzner [18], McCoy [19], Menchik [20], Buehler [21], Qodir [22], Assyaukanie [23], and Kraince [24] have studied the Indonesian intolerance movement's evolution, causes, and effects. Their data imply that many colleges promote radical anti-diversity beliefs. Famous research institutions like the Wahid Institute [25], Setara Institute [26] [27], Institute for Islamic and Peace Studies (LaKIP) [28], Center for Islamic Studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta [29], and CRCS UGM [30] [31] have found intolerant movements, radicalism, and fundamentalism among academics, students, and lecturers. These studies link religious intolerance to radicalism. Radicalism and intolerance not only affect religion but also culture, ethnicity, race, and regionality.

Indonesia is not alone in seeing campuses and students become less accepting. Akkari and Radhouane [32] found that cultural diversity management in US education is still inconsistent. Constitutionally and through Civil Society Movements, ethnic minorities are guaranteed educational equality, although slavery and racial discrimination continue to cause pain. Rosblith [33] adds that religion in schools and public schools in the US are marked by misunderstanding, uncertainty, friction, and antagonism. Religion frequently promotes exclusivity. Orthodox sects claim exclusive truth of religion and salvation. Research in other countries shows that White Supremacy in the US and Islamophobia in other regions contribute to intolerance. This shows that intolerance is global and requires local solutions. Thus, managing diversity and promoting tolerant education is a global priority that demands local solutions.

This study examines higher education institutions' diversity management techniques in light of these conditions. It suggests how these institutions might promote tolerance teaching on their campuses, focusing on Indonesia. The study analyzes data from East Nusa Tenggara Province's diverse and tolerant universities to substantiate this. East Nusa Tenggara, an Indonesian province, is known for its religious harmony, according to Ministry of Religious Affairs research. This reality is present in society and academia, requiring strategic measures to foster tolerance in East Nusa Tenggara. This study shares excellent practices done thus far.

The article sequentially discusses campuses as spaces of diverse interactions, the alarming instances of intolerance in these academic institutions, how campuses can effectively manage diversity and promote tolerance education, and East Nusa Tenggara's best practices that could benefit Indonesia.

2 Method

This It includes views and thoughts on universities' role in managing educational diversity and encouraging tolerance, and it shares best practices from East Nusa Tenggara people and campuses. A qualitative study that uses critical and analytical thinking and draws from many studies and research achieves the first goal. Critical and analytical thinking entails logically analyzing and interpreting information. The goal is to impartially assess data, arguments, and ideas to achieve sound findings or make informed judgments. It involves analyzing and judging information. This competence helps solve problems across domains [34] [35] [36].

The second purpose is achieved through 2023 field research involving lectures and students at 12 East Nusa Tenggara university campuses. These campuses are on Flores, Timor, Alor, and Sumba. Focus group discussions and interviews collected data. These campuses' best practices

are part of a bigger research project on East Nusa Tenggara students, lecturers, and campus governance's attitudes, perceptions, and management of (in)tolerance. The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (DRTPM) financed this research.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1. University campuses: cultural melting pots or breeding grounds for intolerance

The university campus fosters intellectual growth across many academic fields. Research, innovation, and development thrive there, advancing knowledge, technology, and life's solutions. Campus life promotes critical thinking and problem-solving among students. Universities help create professional and personal networks. Universities let students study their interests and develop skills. They train pupils for jobs. Students learn life skills on campus. Campuses foster personal growth, character development, and societal responsibility [37] [38] [39].

College campuses are also meeting places. They bring together people from different social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds to study and flourish. Each person brings their own values, experiences, and viewpoints, creating a vibrant and diverse environment. Diverse people share ideas, information, and experiences on campus. Globalization has transformed campuses into places to study and celebrate other cultures [40].

As an intellectual and scientific space, the university campus should reflect a heterogeneous society that values variety, tolerance, and multiculturalism. Campuses can foster intolerance, radicalism, and discrimination; therefore this objective is not always achieved. Educational intolerance is a global issue. Educational environments should promote noble principles like freedom from discrimination and intolerance as logical, educated, and dignified communities.

However, much study shows university campus intolerance [41]. Instead of promoting diversity, these academic settings often promote toxic ideology, anti-diversity networks, and efforts to marginalize people with different beliefs and cultures. Through religion, social events, and social media, intolerant groups try to discredit other religions. They exclude others and discriminate against those who disagree with them. More extremist, they justify violence against individuals with different ideas, including suicide. "Religion and Higher Education in Europe and North America," edited by Kristin Aune and Jacqueline Stevenson [42], discusses campus student and staff perspectives. Europe saw a rise in religious extremism, including discrimination, harassment, and hate speech. These phenomena are caused by racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia.

This disturbing trend requires schools to better control fundamentalist movements and protect free speech. However, this investigation also discovered rising human connectivity and solidarity. The causes of intolerance in European higher education include poor moral attitudes.

According to the introduction, several Indonesian studies agree. Indonesian campuses have been used by extremist religious groups to spread their ideals. Educational or curricular activities can propagate the model through lessons and educators. Some are done through extracurriculars, student groups, and alumni networks [44–47]. Recently, Ikhrom et al. [48] found intolerance in Islamic religious texts to a limited extent. These textbooks can promote intolerant conduct among students, which is sometimes misattributed to Islam. This happens when editing, writing, and reviewing are neglected.

Campus intolerance has a big impact. Internally, these movements threaten campus security and intellectual standards. They can limit people's expression of their culture, values, and beliefs. Hate-targeted groups feel unsafe in schools. Their speech may be restricted. This can potentially weaken campus democracy. Intolerance promotes group division, prejudice, and

suspicion. Intolerant people turn a welcoming community into a closed, unquestioning one full of fear and threats. Having this happen in academia can impair scientific spirit and professionalism. These effects emphasize the need of tolerance and multiculturalism in higher education.

3.2. Management of Higher Education Diversity and Tolerance Education

Higher education institutions must work strategically to combat intolerant social movements that are entering academia. These institutions must be more proactive in managing diversity and promoting tolerance and multiculturalism. Higher education may foster an open, dialogic, and multicultural culture by promoting beneficial traits needed in a pluralistic society.

This is where universities can play many roles. Mostly, they can openly include tolerance and multicultural education in their curriculum, courses, and materials. Tolerance, openness, and multiculturalism are developed by deliberate and intentional cultivation [49]. Thus, institutions should offer courses to help students accept diversity, respect social differences, and understand prejudice. Diverse education, inclusive education, citizenship education, religious moderation, cross-cultural understanding, and religious education have promoted tolerance and diversity [50]. Locally appropriate courses can be created by each school.

Universities may include tolerance and multiculturalism into all courses, not just specialist ones. Every course can shape students' openness and respect for differences. Educators model tolerance beyond the classroom. Teachers should promote peace, safety, discourse, openness, and respect for student diversity regardless of the subject. Teachers must consider pupils' religion, culture, ethnicity, and other values. Thus, when teaching or doing activities with students, they model tolerance and pluralism.

Second, universities can organize multiculturalism-promoting extracurriculars [50]. Universities provide extensive resources and possibilities to promote intergroup interaction based on ethnicity, religion, culture, study program, etc. These activities can include arts and culture festivals, interfaith dialogues, lesson exchanges, seminars, workshops, discussions on interfaith and multicultural issues, tolerance and multiculturalism training, exhibitions, competitions, visits to various places of worship, and community-specific work devotion and dialogue.

Third, institutions should foster an inclusive, tolerant, and open campus. The campus should model diversity management with non-discriminatory policies, norms, and processes that promote inclusion and tolerance. No matter their origin, universities must treat everyone with respect, equality, and justice. In addition to the curriculum, campuses should promote inclusiveness and tolerance in faculty, student, and staff relationships. Campuses should prioritize minority students with appropriate resources and support. They can help people who struggle to communicate across religions/cultures using diversity therapy. Inclusion, tolerance, and multiculturalism should be promoted on campuses [51].

Fourthly, colleges should promote research and community involvement that promotes multiculturalism and education. As trustworthy institutions for innovation, new information, and skills, universities are urged to provide high-quality research on tolerance and multiculturalism. Universities could also offer education/learning models, apps, media, technology, and skills to help campuses and the community become more tolerant and prevent bigotry. Campuses can directly promote tolerance and multiculturalism with the community. The campus should radiate tranquility.

Fifthly, campuses can create deradicalization programs for intolerance and radicalism victims. If campus signs indicate exposure, the campus can organize programs to reintegrate these individuals/groups, making them more accepting and open.

Higher education can work with campus and outside stakeholders. To promote tolerant and multicultural education and campus life, campuses might work with religious, educational, government, and other institutions.

3.3. East Nusa Tenggara Insights

With its many islands, dialects, traditions, and faiths, East Nusa Tenggara celebrates diversity. This province has 1200 islands, 40 of which are inhabited, and several cultures and nationalities. Numerous tribes speak their own languages on Flores, Timor, Sumba, Alor, Sabu, Lembata, Adonara, Rote, Ende, and Komodo. Indonesian is the lingua franca for approximately 60 regional languages in this province, bridging tribal language divides.

Each East Nusa Tenggara tribe has its own customs. Despite variations, villages, tribes, and regions have familial relationships. East Nusa Tenggara residents have long lived peacefully with diverse cultures, beliefs, dialects, and traditions [52]. With customary relationships and family as unifying influences, this diversity management has been refined through history and culture. Traditional leaders continue to unite their people. Philipus Tule [53] [54] found that traditional buildings and communities unite residents of different ethnicities, beliefs, and religions.

East Nusa Tenggara, a province in Indonesia, is predominantly Christian (Catholicism and Protestantism). The population's religious breakdown in 2021 was Catholic 52.45%, Protestant 39.26%, Muslim 8.09%, Hindu 0.19%, Buddhist 0.01%, and Confucian and others (BPS, 2020). From 2012 to 2022, the Ministry of Religion found that this province continuously ranks high on Indonesia's Religious Harmony index, which measures religious tolerance, equality, and collaboration. This implies a growing religious tolerance in the province, adding to its diversity.

Numerous studies, including those by the Ministry of Religion, have confirmed East Nusa Tenggara's religious tolerance. The region's religious harmony is often praised on social media under titles like "learning tolerance from East Nusa Tenggara" or "this is in East Nusa Tenggara".

We heard several stories of tolerance from locals, including academics, staff, and students, on East Nusa Tenggara campuses. These community stories demonstrate East Nusa Tenggara's traditional tolerance. Cultural tolerance and appreciation for variety are not new to religious conversation and moderation initiatives.

In Alor, a mosque and chapel named "Ishak" and "Ismail" were built. These names have religious significance in Islam and Christianity, making this notable. Muslims are Ishmael descendants, Christians Isaac descendants. Abraham wanted to present his favorite son to God, but the stories differ. Christian tradition prefers Isaac, but Islamic tradition favors Ishmael. Despite these disparities, which often lead to arguments, Alor's people have shown a unique model of discourse, brotherhood, and unity. They built mosques and churches side by side, calling them Ishak and Ismail to symbolize togetherness, kinship, and peace. East Nusa Tenggara is known for interfaith collaboration in building religious buildings.

Despite their many religious connections, Sumba residents believe in their tribes' shared ancestry. This conviction underlies their tradition-based cohesiveness. East Sumba hosts annual interfaith sports tournaments. Eyewitnesses say these competitions always end peacefully, unlike other matches. In Flores, interfaith marriages create multifamily families. They are bound by tradition and customs. Kinship links unite people into a family, fostering support and respect.

Traditional discussions promote respect for different religions. Muslims replace pigs with goats in animal offerings. Catholic and Christian families include Muslims in communal meals because they bring halal cuisine. This shows how multiple religious practices can survive in families and communities.

Interfaith cooperation is visible in many facets of community life beyond building churches. Examples include building traditional dwellings and enjoying religious holidays together. To ensure successful Christmas and Easter events, members of various religious communities help with security, parking, and committees. The same teamwork is shown when Muslims worship. Longstanding tradition: Christmas visits. All religions are represented in weddings, burials, ordinations, circumcisions, confirmations, village thanksgivings, and other familial and traditional celebrations. Interfaith conversation about life and work is popular in East Nusa Tenggara. Our research found that traditional behaviors, familial ties, and religious education models contribute to East Nusa Tenggara's tolerance [55].

East Nusa Tenggara's universities are important social units. Current data shows 58 universities under the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Research and Technology, including 3 state and several private universities. Universities are also associated with the Ministry of Health and Religion. Most campuses are religious, but students and faculty reflect the surrounding community.

These universities and schools shape East Nusa Tenggara's inhabitants. In 2023, a Focus Group Discussion with 12 colleges yielded many tales, suggestions, and best practices on campus diversity management and tolerance and harmony.

The good behaviors in society are also seen on campuses, as colleges promote diversity and fraternity across faiths and cultures. Higher education is important in East Nusa Tenggara. Data shows 58 universities under the Ministry of Education and Culture in East Nusa Tenggara, including 3 public and several private universities. Other ministries, like Health and Religion, have universities.

Private universities often partner with Catholic, Protestant, Islamic, and public institutions. These schools shape East Nusa Tenggara's people: character and quality. Since religious entities founded most universities, religions have a big impact. This effect extends from college to kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high school.

This research collected anecdotes, perspectives, and best practices on how colleges manage diversity and promote tolerance and harmony from Focus Group Discussions with 12 universities in 2023.

Since its founding, many foundations have provided higher education to diverse students. The campus vision and aim to establish a superior society emphasize diversity. Campuses encourage all religions to study together. Foundations linked with particular religions hire professors and personnel based on qualifications, not religion, ethnicity, or culture. All are welcome to major higher education positions. Several IKIP Muhammadiyah Maumere Heads of Study Programs and Institutions are Catholic. The Indonesian Catholic University Santu Paulus Ruteng and Catholic University of Widya Mandira-Kupang allow non-Catholics to hold official and other positions. Kalabahi Alor University, controlled by the Protestant Church Foundation, allows non-Christians to hold significant campus posts. Even if Foundation members and most lecturers and students belong to the majority religion in the area, private campuses that are not linked with a particular religion assure religious diversity in official recruitment.

Second, institutions promote diversity tolerance through curricular and extracurricular programming. All faiths receive religious education at state universities. Policy diversity is greater in private entities. Some campuses teach one religion. Off-campus religious studies are available to students whose faiths are not supported on campus. They can also participate in

campus religious education even if it doesn't match their faith. Lecturers do not encourage religious conversion in such cases. Students can also discuss their religion in class. These pupils regularly surpass those who follow the lecturer's religion, according to multiple lecturers. These classes enable campus religious conversation and interactions.

Other courses promote diversity conversation besides religious studies. Lecturers promote tolerance and respect for differences. Across campuses, lecturers treat students fairly, without religious prejudice, in exams, assignments, and campus leadership responsibilities. Extracurricular activities welcome all students, regardless of religion. Encourage participation from everybody. Other religious groups on campus can choose to participate in religious activities that conflict with their faith. Extracurricular activities promote constructive connection and respect between kids of different faiths.

Thirdly, college programs promote minority inclusion. Institutions help minority student organizations form. The Catholic student association at IKIP Muhammadiyah Maumere and the Muslim student organization at Unika St. Paulus Ruteng practice this. IKIP Maumere sponsors student Christmas and Easter service activities and creates spiritual development programs like recalls and retreats for Catholic lecturers and students. At Unika Widya Mandira, they host a campus iftar. Minority representation are included on university committees for scientific, social, and religious events on and off campus.

Fourthly, universities offer tolerance, multiculturalism, and religious moderation training in line with the popularity of religious moderation programs. Some use campus resource people, while others use interfaith resource people from other institutions. Religious institutions, figures, and platforms often collaborate on religious harmony communication. The ultimate goal is to create an open, diverse campus that promotes dialogue. Lecturers and students also make group house visits during friends' or lecturers' religious holidays or help families in need.

The people of East Nusa Tenggara and campuses' efforts to manage diversity and promote tolerance and multiculturalism are beneficial social capital for a peaceful and harmonious society. However, intolerance and rejection of diversity are always possible. To avoid greater confrontations, disputes, competitiveness, and interests between people of various religions and traditions must be monitored. As an open society, NTT citizens must watch out for intolerant and extreme views from outside.

4 Conclusion

Globalization and technology have increased human interaction. These interactions should enrich both parties. Unfortunately, some people and groups struggle to accept others with different values, ideologies, cultures, faiths, and beliefs. These groups are socially inactive and intolerant to differences. Some extreme believers deny the existence of others and take drastic measures to marginalize and eliminate them. Such organizations can form anywhere, including in universities, threatening unity, harmony, peace, and conflict.

Academic places must be intolerance-free. Educational institutions must strategically manage diversity and encourage tolerance and multiculturalism to combat campus intolerance. Learning activities, curriculum design, extracurricular activities, and a tolerant and open campus can embrace this. Campuses should also offer research and community service activities to build a peaceful, equitable, and tolerant society. East Nusa Tenggara Province's people and universities are noted for their amicable, tolerant, and open inter-religious and intercultural relations

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