



Empathy and prosocial: An interfaith psychology study among Ternate City students

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ABSTRACT

The diversity of religions, cultures, and universities in Ternate City gives rise to social dynamics that are not only complex but also hold great potential to strengthen human and national solidarity, or, conversely, to foster significant disharmony. Therefore, this study aims to explore the interfaith psychological approach, empathy, and prosocial behaviors as efforts to promote harmonious social relations. Specifically, it seeks to identify forms of empathy and prosocial behavior in interfaith interactions among Muslim and non-Muslim students in Ternate City. Using a qualitative phenomenological method, this study explores students' subjective experiences in understanding and expressing empathy, and how these experiences manifest in interfaith prosocial actions. The study involved 15 respondents. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs), and analyzed using the phenomenological approach of Moustakas and Husserl, which includes the stages of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning. The research identified three main themes of empathy: Affective Empathy, arising from spiritual values; Compassionate Empathy, serving as the foundation for emotional support; and Intellectual Empathy, emphasizing rationality in conflict resolution. The study concludes that empathy and prosocial behavior are essential foundations for strengthening interfaith solidarity and contribute significantly to character development in higher education settings.

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Introduction

Essentially, religion exists to promote a mission of peace, sacred values, and harmony in life by fostering freedom of religion, raising awareness, and humanizing all religious communities. Demographically, according to the Indonesia Knowledge Hub on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism (I-Khub, 2025), North Maluku Province is home to a diverse range of religions, including Islam (74.50%), Protestantism (24.97%), Catholicism (0.50%), Hinduism (0.01%), Buddhism (0.01%), and Confucianism (0.01%). These religious differences are closely linked to the religious conflict between Muslims and Christians that occurred in North Maluku in 1999 (Ismail, 2021; I-KHUB, 2025).

This religious conflict has led to the destruction of socio-humanitarian principles, the breakdown of interfaith relations, the disruption of the economic order, and the degradation of morality, norms, and human values. However, following the conflict that occurred between 1999 and 2002, inter-religious tensions in North Maluku Province, particularly in Ternate City, have subsided due to the community's embrace of tolerance. This tolerance is characterized by empathetic behavior and prosocial actions (Ismail, 2021; Arvanti et al., 2024).

In higher education, students constitute a unique social group because they are in a critical phase of forming their personal identity, strengthening moral values, and developing social attitudes. During this period, individuals begin to cultivate value orientations such as empathy, tolerance, and a propensity for prosocial behavior (Arnett, 2000). Numerous studies confirm that early adulthood is a pivotal stage for the development of empathy and social sensitivity, as individuals increasingly engage in diverse interactions with people from various cultural and religious backgrounds (Eisenberg et al., 2015).

Empathy is the ability to perceive and understand others' emotions (Decety, 2020). Without this ability, individuals cannot view problems from different perspectives, leading to feelings of alienation from the challenges others face. Furthermore, prosocial behavior refers to voluntary, unselfish actions intended to benefit others, both physically and psychologically, often without direct personal gain (Baron & Byrne, 2005; Hui et al., 2020).

Empathy and prosocial behavior are two fundamental components of fostering a harmonious social life, particularly within the Ternate community, which is characterized by strong cultural and religious pluralism. Religious diversity is not only a social reality but also serves as a foundation for learning interfaith ethics. Empathy, the ability to understand and share others' emotional states, plays a crucial role in shaping prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing, and showing concern, regardless of religious background (Jiang et al., 2021; Peng et al., 2024; Huder, 2024).

Previous studies have demonstrated that religiosity significantly correlates with an individual's propensity to engage in prosocial behavior, primarily by enhancing empathy as a mediating factor. Religious students tend to exhibit increased empathy and greater engagement with prosocial media, which ultimately reinforces their prosocial behavior (Yusoff et al., 2022; Al Ghanam, 2024). Additionally, a study comparing the influence of mindfulness on prosocial behavior across two cultures, Indonesia and China, indicated that cultural factors can either strengthen or weaken the relationship between empathy and prosocial behavior (Li et al., 2024). This point provides theoretical support for conducting further in-depth research in a local context, such as Ternate City, a multireligious city with a history of religious tolerance.

The urgency of this research arises from the critical need to mitigate the risk of severe disharmony and latent conflict in Ternate City, which has been historically overshadowed by the collective memory of the 1999 riots that severely undermined socio-humanitarian principles. Focusing on students is essential because they are in a formative phase of developing identities and value orientations that will shape the future of peace. This study offers novelty by employing a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore subjective conscious experiences often overlooked in quantitative research. Additionally, it makes an original theoretical contribution through the concept of "Intellectual Empathy," which suggests that conflict resolution in a multicultural society requires not only emotional understanding but also rational intervention to prevent discrimination.

This research offers a novel contribution by employing a transcendental phenomenological approach to uncover the conscious interfaith experiences of Muslim and non-Muslim students in a post-conflict, multicultural setting, an area seldom examined in previous prosocial and empathy studies. The study introduces the concept of Intellectual Empathy, a distinct form of rational-reflective empathy that enables students to mediate intergroup tensions and navigate social identity boundaries more effectively than affective or compassionate empathy alone. Furthermore, the findings highlight culturally grounded mechanisms, such as spiritual values, long-standing interfaith socialization, and community-based collaboration, that shape unique patterns of empathy and prosocial behavior not fully accounted for by Western theoretical models. Collectively, these contributions extend cross-cultural psychological theory by demonstrating how empathy and prosociality emerge within a localized sociocultural system characterized by pluralism and a history of conflict transformation.

Therefore, this research was conducted to address the question: What forms of empathy and prosocial actions do Muslim and non-Muslim students undertake to strengthen humanitarian and national solidarity in Ternate City?

Method

This research employed a qualitative method grounded in transcendental phenomenology, drawing on Husserl (1970) and Moustakas (1994), to understand students' conscious experiences in developing empathy and prosocial behavior toward peers from diverse backgrounds [Fatah, 2023; Chapman & Wang, 2025; Jennings & Yeager, 2025]. The primary data sources comprised Muslim and non-Muslim students from three universities in Ternate City: UMMU, IAIN Ternate, and Unkhair. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Data analysis followed Moustakas's phenomenological analysis approach.

The research procedure comprised five stages: (1) Literature Review, involving the examination of relevant theories; (2) Instrument Validation, conducted through internal discussions within the research team; (3) Data Collection, which included observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs); (4) Data Analysis, employing the phenomenological approach of Moustakas and Husserl, encompassing Epoche, Collection of Pure Descriptions, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis of Meaning (Oliveira & Goto, 2020; Marek, 2021; Fatah, 2023; Fatah, 2024); and (5) Final Report and Research Publication, which completed the overall research process.

The purpose of observation is to enable the researcher to document the nuances of cross-religious interactions in a natural setting through real-time interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). This approach allows for the capture of body language and group dynamics that cannot be fully explored through verbal methods alone.

The data analysis employed the transcendental phenomenological method, which consists of four stages: (1) Collection of Pure Descriptions, involving a detailed elaboration of the subject's phenomenon through the preparation of interview transcripts; (2) Phenomenological Reduction, which entails selecting key statements from the transcripts; (3) Imaginative Variation, involving the categorization of data into specific themes; and (4) Synthesis of Meaning, which entails formulating the essence or profound meaning of the subject's experience.

The data collection process began with a preliminary survey using an empathy questionnaire based on the theory of Baron and Byrne (2005), which comprised 10 items. This method was followed by the administration of the Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM), grounded in the theory of Carlo and Randall (2003) and consisting of 9 items. The survey respondents included 50 students from three universities: Universitas Muhammadiyah Maluku Utara, Universitas Khairun, and Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Ternate. After analyzing the survey results, 15 respondents were selected for in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The selection criteria were as follows: 1) active university students; 2) Muslim and non-Muslim students; 3) activists in religious organizations; and 4) individuals living in a cross-religious environment. The research sample, consisting of 15 individuals from various universities and religious backgrounds, is described as follows in Tabel 1.

Table 1. Survey Data and Research Sample Distribution

University	Total Data	Sample
Muhammadiyah University of North Maluku	17	5
Khairun University of Ternate	17	5
State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Ternate	16	5

The data collection technique employed in this study was purposive sampling, in which the researcher selected participants who met specific criteria and were relevant to the research objectives. One selection criterion was that participants included both Muslim and non-Muslim individuals, drawn from each campus. The sample data, categorized by religion, is presented in Table 2, encompassing both Muslim and non-Muslim groups.

Table 2. Sample Distribution by Religion

Religion	Samples
Muslim	8
Non-Muslim	7

The research sample at each university consisted of 15 respondents from different religious backgrounds: 8 Muslims and 7 non-Muslims. The following data represent the respondents' identities in Table 3.

Table 3. Research Participants Demographic Characteristics

Participants Initials	Gender	Age (Years)	Religion
T.B	Female	19	Islam
R.W	Male	21	Islam
M.W	Female	22	Christianity
S.S.T	Female	19	Christianity
N.M.S	Male	22	Islam
V. F. A	Female	22	Islam
R.A	Male	20	Islam
F.B.D	Female	23	Islam
N.F.M.S	Male	22	Islam
W.R.M	Female	22	Islam
N.D.D	Male	22	Christianity
M.D	Female	22	Christianity
S.Y.N	Male	23	Christianity
G.N	Female	23	Christianity
T	Female	26	Islam

Results

Based on interviews, observation, and FGD results, empathy and prosocial behavior in interfaith interactions serve as the foundation for strengthening solidarity between Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities. Observations during the interviews and FGDs revealed that both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were able to communicate without barriers. This finding was demonstrated by participants naturally sitting intermixed regardless of religion when the discussions began. Furthermore, empathetic body language was clearly evident; as respondents shared their opinions and experiences, others displayed expressions of acceptance, such as nodding, which fostered a sense of safety for sharing subjective experiences. These observational findings confirm that the narratives respondents shared during interviews and FGDs are relevant to and consistent with their actual lives.

Using a transcendental-phenomenological approach, this study authentically portrays participants' experiences of empathy and prosocial actions, aiming to understand the essential meaning of each individual's experience across diverse backgrounds (Moustakas, 2020). Following data collection from 15 participants, the next step is to analyze the various forms of empathy and prosocial behaviors exhibited by the subjects in an interfaith context. Based on the results of open coding, three primary themes related to empathy emerged: (1) empathy rooted in spiritual values and interfaith social relationships, (2) empathy as a connection and

foundation for emotional support, and (3) conflict resolution through mediation and education. Additionally, three themes of prosocial actions were identified: (1) direct assistance to individuals in need, (2) volunteering to foster cooperation within diverse community settings, and (3) giving, sharing, and education as expressions of social concern. These six main themes were subsequently analyzed to elucidate the specific forms of empathy and prosocial behavior.

Empathy that grows from spiritual values and interfaith social relationships

The experiences shared by several participants indicate that they grew up in environments rich in diverse cultures and religions from childhood. This exposure provided them with a deeper understanding of the customs, practices, and spiritual values that must be respected across these differences. Such understanding also heightened their sensitivity and compassion when witnessing others with different beliefs facing challenges. They felt a sense of belonging and concern when others encountered difficulties. Furthermore, the shared habits developed through daily activities helped diminish perceived barriers between them. Participant T.B. (Islam) illustrated this profound socialization:

"I grew up in a community where both Christian and Muslim faiths coexisted harmoniously. In our village, interfaith relations were very positive. From a young age, we were encouraged to celebrate all holidays together, both Christian and Muslim. During Ramadan, Christians helped clean the mosque, and during Christmas, Muslims helped clean the church. As a result, I have become very accustomed to living side by side with people of different faiths. Many of my friends are also Christian."

On the other hand, spiritual values that emphasize compassion have been instilled in participants since childhood. These values are reflected in every action they take, which requires careful consideration. Over time, these spiritual values develop into a moral compass that guides their behavior, fostering a sense of connectedness with others. Additionally, these values are reinforced through interfaith social interactions, where participants engage with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds, offering them diverse perspectives on interfaith issues. This claim was expressed by participant R.W. (Islam), who stated:

"In my village, when Christian friends hunt pigs, they know how to avoid disturbing their Muslim friends. If they make a mistake, they are gently corrected and then make amends. Islam is a tolerant religion, but matters of faith are treated differently. Humanity should come before all else, even when we have differences, because human nature is inherently inclined toward goodness."

Empathy as a connection and basis for emotional support

Participants demonstrated that empathy can be expressed not only through physical presence but also through emotional support when witnessing a friend experiencing difficulties, regardless of their religion. The most important form of support is for the person in need to feel heard without judgment, providing them with a safe space to express their feelings. By attentively listening to the needs of those in distress, participants are better able to understand the appropriate assistance. They emphasized that empathy transcends mere physical presence; it involves creating a "safe space" where peers feel heard without fear of judgment. Participant N.D.D. (Christian) described this non-intrusive support:

"Usually, I ask what the problem is and how I can help. I don't force him to talk if he doesn't want to, but when he is ready to share, I offer my opinion. I listen more and, if he wants to find a solution, I help. Otherwise, I let him make his own decisions."

Furthermore, information indicated that the emotional connection formed when a friend experiences problems is conveyed not only verbally but also nonverbally. This assertion was explained by V.F.A. (Islam). In such cases, body language is expressed when a friend is facing

difficulties. For example, appropriate facial expressions, embracing when needed, and maintaining eye contact are used. These non-verbal behaviors demonstrate that the individual is fully present and attentive to the problem.

"It is important to show that I care through body language. I often hug them, which usually causes them to cry. I believe that body language helps them feel heard and supported, not alone."

Conflict resolution through mediation and education

Empathy is not just about understanding what others feel. In interfaith life, which involves varying group dynamics, a compassionate approach is essential, but it also requires a consistent use of reason when faced with potentially disruptive conflict. One approach is mediating between conflicting groups. As S.Y.N (Christian) explained, when a conflict arose among Christian youth over behavior that disrupted peace between religious communities, the older members of the group intervened, leading to a resolution acceptable to both parties.

"At that time, a group of teenagers was causing a commotion with their Muslim friends by using insults, possibly because these students did not get along well with people of different religions. A fight broke out; although they claimed it was a joke, it was disruptive. Eventually, our seniors gathered them together, mediated the situation, offered advice, and finally, the conflict stopped. "We have to listen to each other, or we'll cause disruption."

R.W. (Islam) echoed this sentiment, stating that in his organizational life, he was taught to mediate conflicts between groups. This experience greatly helped him become directly involved in resolving issues as they arose. R.W. emphasized the importance of reflecting on each problem he encountered and evaluating whether a similar situation might occur again.

"I once had a Christian friend who had a conflict with another friend of mine. I called them both to discuss the issue together. Based on our shared humanity, we must embrace one another. Regardless of our differences, we should support each other. It would be shameful to discriminate against one another like that. What if the same happened to me?"

Direct assistance to individuals in need

Assuming the roles of students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds provided participants with varied perspectives on a single issue. Some participants experienced a shift in viewpoint (perceptual transformation), initially holding negative attitudes toward other religious groups due to limited interaction, but later adopting a more positive, open perspective after direct engagement. Prosocial behaviors were observed among individuals, including providing direct assistance, collaborating with religious groups, and participating in community activities involving the broader community. Participant N.M.S. (Islam) confirmed that religious differences did not impede financial or emotional support, stating:

"Yes, if there is anything I can do to help, I will, because my friend is like a brother to me, even though we have different beliefs. Several times, when my friend needed money, I have lent him funds according to my means. I also offer support with his problems, helping him as much as I can."

S.S.T. (Christian) similarly stated that he provided assistance with the intention of helping without expecting anything in return.

"At that time, my friend asked for help because her parents were late in sending her money for food while she was in college. We were from the same village and already knew each other, so I lent her the money. I felt sorry for her, seeing her struggle and being unable to do anything because she had no money."

Volunteering to build cooperation in different community environments

Furthermore, volunteering and interfaith cooperation emerged as bridges for social cohesion. Participants engaged in community service programs, such as the "Community Service Program," and collaborative religious activities, including cleaning houses of worship belonging to other faiths. M.W. (Christian) highlighted this cross-group cooperation, noting:

"Our church organization collaborates with other churches in Ternate. We also participated in a community trash collection event with the Ministry of Religious Affairs. During the fasting month, we distributed Takjil (snacks) together. Although I was not initially invited, I took the initiative to join because I was happy to be involved."

N.F.M.S (Islam) expressed a similar sentiment, stating that joint activities with other religious groups have been a regular part of their program since school. It is common for participants to engage in such activities, as they have been accustomed to doing so for a long time.

"At that school, we had a community service program. Every Friday, we were responsible for cleaning the mosque, and on Saturdays, we cleaned the church. We also celebrated events like Isra Mi'raj and Christmas together."

Giving, sharing, and education as a form of social concern

Finally, prosociality manifested in vertical relationships between seniors and juniors through mentoring and educational sharing. Participants provided mentorship, including both material support and emotional guidance, to help new students adapt to the campus environment. F.B.D. (Islam) described her experience mentoring:

"At that time, I was a mentor for the new student P2KK program. I felt happy because I could help them and gained a lot of valuable experience. I asked them what they needed. Even now, our relationship remains strong, and we still keep in touch through social media. I also bought from them several times at the bazaar. Although I wasn't always hungry, I knew they needed the support, so I helped."

Discussion

Contextually, the dynamics of religious diversity in Ternate City present a significant risk of disharmony and latent conflict, stemming from the collective memory of 1999, which once disrupted the moral order and socio-humanitarian principles. Mitigating this risk requires an approach that goes beyond emotional reactions and embraces what Lederach (1995) terms intellectual empathy in conflict transformation theory, emphasizing the need for rationality to prevent discrimination and halt divisive conflicts. Without appropriate intervention, the primary obstacle is the persistence of negative stereotypes arising from limited interaction. This phenomenon is explained by Allport's (1954) contact hypothesis, which posits that prejudice and social segregation will continue unless cooperation toward common goals occurs, thereby eroding group boundaries.

Furthermore, value resistance often stems from the trap of exclusive group identity. According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), interfaith interaction is crucial for broadening social identity to be more inclusive; without it, individuals tend to maintain ingroup biases that hinder solidarity (Lim et al., 2024; Bar-On & Lamm, 2023). This barrier is exacerbated by deficits in perspective-taking, as Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) explain, which lead to psychological alienation. Conversely, recent experimental evidence shows that perspective-taking can reduce intergroup bias in visual representation and social perception (Hutchings et al., 2021). Therefore, to overcome fear and resistance in new students, the role of role models is vital, in accordance with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986), which emphasizes that prosocial behavior must be learned through direct observation. Empirical studies confirm that exposure to role models, whether private, public, or peer-based prosocial

contagion, can foster prosocial behavior and intergroup acceptance (Abel & Brown, 2022; Chávez et al., 2024).

Affective empathy

Affective empathy plays a crucial role in fostering prosocial behavior among Muslim and non-Muslim students, thereby strengthening humanitarian and national solidarity in Ternate City. This study reveals that affective empathy strengthens bonds among interfaith groups, with participants' empathy rooted in spiritual values and in interfaith social relationships cultivated since childhood. Participants internalized religious principles emphasizing compassion, respect for others, and universal brotherhood, which manifested as empathy toward individuals from different religious backgrounds. The interfaith empathy observed in this study can be understood through the integration of several key theoretical frameworks. These findings align with recent research demonstrating that inclusive religiosity promotes intergroup empathy and reduces social bias (Rahman & Wojcieszak, 2022; Huo et al., 2023).

Early interactions in multireligious environments offer participants valuable opportunities to understand diverse interfaith perspectives. This result aligns with research by Chen and Ibasco (2023), which confirms that early interfaith contact strengthens prosocial attitudes (Peng et al., 2024). Moreover, individuals raised in multicultural settings are more likely to appreciate others' viewpoints and demonstrate greater sensitivity to social needs (Lim et al., 2024). Consequently, empathy emerges from a combination of spiritual values, social experiences, and inclusive group identity dynamics. This empathy is further reinforced through interfaith social relations, where participants engage with people from diverse religious backgrounds, gaining varied perspectives on interfaith issues. Within the framework of social identity, harmonious interfaith experiences help expand the boundaries of social categories, fostering more inclusive identities. Research by Rahman and Wojcieszak (2022) found that sustained exposure to interfaith interactions reduces negative stereotypes and enhances emotional closeness across groups.

Compassionate empathy

Research indicates that it extends beyond physical presence to include emotional presence, ensuring that individuals feel heard and valued. Participants emphasized the importance of providing a "safe space" for colleagues facing challenges to express their feelings without fear of judgment. This empathetic presence fosters a sense of emotional connection and solidarity, leading to more open and supportive interpersonal relationships. These findings align with research by Allemand and Steiger (2022) and Xiao et al. (2021), which confirm that empathy is critical for maintaining social connectedness and facilitating high-quality social support. Their studies found that supportive communication is a strong predictor of improved emotional well-being and relationship quality.

Nonverbal cues also play a critical role, as Choi et al. (2024) demonstrated that nonverbal compassion, expressed through eye contact, facial mimicry, and head-nodding, significantly increases feelings of being understood and reduces emotional intensity in interpersonal interactions. Supporting this finding, Schneider et al. (2023) showed that affectionate touch in daily life is associated with lower cortisol levels and higher psychological well-being, indicating a physiological pathway through which touch promotes acceptance and emotional regulation. Furthermore, neurobehavioral evidence from Wever et al. (2024) indicates that prolonged direct eye contact enhances mood and feelings of connectedness, reinforcing the notion that nonverbal expression plays a crucial role in fostering social bonding and emotional acceptance across relational boundaries. Thus, compassionate empathy in interfaith interactions can be understood as an emotional connection strengthened by supportive communication, nonverbal cues, and prosocial motivation. This result suggests that empathy serves not only as an emotional response but also as a foundation for harmonious social relations amid religious differences.

Intellectual empathy

Intellectual empathy involves more than simply understanding another person's feelings. In interfaith communities characterized by diverse group dynamics, a compassionate approach must be balanced with rationality when addressing potentially disruptive conflicts. The intellectual empathy identified in this study is demonstrated by participants' ability not only to comprehend others' emotions but also to apply rationality in resolving interfaith conflicts through mediation and self-reflection to achieve just outcomes. This form of empathy was evident in the participants' capacity to adopt the perspectives of other groups, mediate disputes, and propose solutions grounded in reflection and fairness. These findings support recent evidence that cognitive empathy and perspective-taking can reduce intergroup bias and discriminatory attitudes in multicultural contexts (Chen & Ibasco, 2023; Lim et al., 2024).

More recent empirical evidence further supports this conclusion, demonstrating that virtual reality-based perspective-taking significantly enhances empathy and improves attitudes toward outgroup members (Chen & Ibasco, 2023). Additionally, a creative mindset can reduce racial ingroup bias in empathic neural responses, indicating that cognitive openness facilitates cross-racial empathy (Huo et al., 2023). Perspective-taking skills also play a crucial role in negotiation and conflict resolution. A recent empirical study on intergroup relations found that the ability to adopt another group's perspective directly increases individuals' willingness to cooperate across group boundaries and significantly reduces intergroup bias (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Lim et al., 2024). These findings suggest that intellectual empathy is not only a cognitive capacity but also a vital social competency for managing conflict and fostering equal, cooperative relationships.

Manifestations of Prosocial Behavior: The analysis further categorized the expression of these empathy themes into specific prosocial actions.

Direct Assistance: having students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds assume roles provided participants with varied perspectives. Some experienced a perceptual transformation, shifting from initial negative views—due to a lack of contact—to positive openness following direct interaction. Prosocial behavior emerged in the form of direct assistance, both material and emotional, demonstrating that empathy influences students' concrete actions. These findings align with a recent study by Van der Graaff et al. (2018), which found that affective and cognitive empathy together increase helping tendencies in late adolescents and young adults. The perspective transformation experienced by participants after interacting with members of other religious groups also corresponds with large-scale empirical findings showing that intergroup contact is consistently associated with reduced prejudice and more positive outgroup evaluations, thereby fostering cross-identity prosocial behavior (Lim, Neel, & Hehman, 2024).

Volunteering and Interfaith Cooperation: Volunteerism has emerged as a vital bridge for social cohesion. Participants engaged in community service programs, such as the Community Service Program (KKN), and collaborative religious activities, including cleaning houses of worship belonging to different faiths. Immersed in diverse communities, participants identified activities that fostered natural rapport and developed work programs tailored to each community's specific needs. This result aligns with longitudinal evidence indicating that involvement in community activities and volunteering predicts increases in social cohesion and interpersonal trust (Davies et al., 2024). Furthermore, recent large-scale analyses reveal that intergroup contact is consistently associated with reduced prejudice across various group boundaries, suggesting that interfaith cooperation in community activities can diminish group bias and promote a more inclusive social identity (Lim et al., 2024).

Mentoring and Educational Sharing: Prosociality also manifests in vertical relationships between seniors and juniors through mentoring and educational sharing. Participants provide mentorship that includes both material support and emotional guidance to help new students adapt to the campus environment. This practice strengthens social bonds while facilitating adaptation for students new to the university. This finding is consistent with Eisenberg and

Fabes's (1998) theory of prosocial development, which emphasizes that social norms and group experiences significantly influence the emergence of sharing behavior, and is supported by Carlo et al.'s (2003) research. The acts of sharing, providing material support, and mentoring new students demonstrate how empathy develops into empowerment. Research by Tinoco-Giraldo et al. (2023) found that mentoring increases prosocial attitudes and emotional closeness between seniors and juniors in higher education settings. In the context of multicultural education, providing support and mentoring strengthens new students' adaptation and expands their interfaith social networks. This finding also aligns with Li et al.'s (2023) research, which found that prosocial mentoring increases students' sense of belonging and tolerance.

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The use of a qualitative, transcendental-phenomenological approach with a limited sample of 15 participants limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the specific context of interfaith students in Ternate City. Additionally, the participants were drawn exclusively from Muslim and Christian backgrounds, thereby excluding other religious groups such as Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian communities, which limits a more comprehensive representation of interfaith dynamics. Future research should expand the participant pool to include students from a broader range of religious backgrounds to achieve a more holistic representation of multicultural societies. Employing mixed-method or longitudinal designs would also be valuable for examining the developmental trajectories of empathy and prosocial behavior over time and for testing their causal relationships with intergroup attitudes and conflict resolution. Furthermore, future studies could quantitatively validate the construct of "Intellectual Empathy" introduced in this study to assess its predictive power for interfaith tolerance, prejudice reduction, and peaceful coexistence. Comparative cross-regional or cross-cultural studies are also recommended to determine whether the patterns of empathy and prosociality identified in Ternate are unique to post-conflict settings or represent broader mechanisms applicable to other multicultural contexts.

Conclusion

Based on the interview and FGD results, it can be concluded that empathy and prosocial behavior in interfaith interactions lay a foundation for strengthening solidarity between Muslim and non-Muslim religious communities. This study identifies three main themes: Affective Empathy, rooted in spiritual values and social relationships across religions; Compassionate Empathy, which serves as a basis for emotional support; and Intellectual Empathy. For future research, it is recommended that respondents represent a broader range of religions beyond Christianity and Islam, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, to ensure more comprehensive and extensive data collection. This study makes a significant contribution to the development of interfaith psychology by demonstrating that empathy, both affective, compassionate, and intellectual, plays a central role in strengthening solidarity within multicultural societies. The identification of intellectual empathy expands theoretical understanding by showing how rational, reflective empathy can reduce conflict and facilitate interfaith dialogue. Culturally, the study highlights how spiritual values and long-standing coexistence in Ternate shape distinctive forms of empathy in a post-conflict context. Practically, the findings offer valuable implications for designing character education programs, interfaith activities, and campus policies that promote inclusive and harmonious social interactions.

Statement of Interest

Both authors of the article declare that they have no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

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