

A Comparative Study of Tolerance and Interfaith Understanding on Student Perspectives Toward the Destruction of Cross Tombstones

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ABSTRACT: The destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan, Yogyakarta highlights the fragility of tolerance and diversity in Indonesian society. University students are strategic actors who can serve as agents of peace in responding to such religious issues. This study comparatively analyzes the influence of religious tolerance and interfaith understanding on the perspectives of students from Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities. Using a mixed-method design, data were collected through an online survey in June 2025 involving 64 respondents, and analyzed with SEM-PLS. Results show that all variable relationships are statistically significant. Interfaith understanding strongly influences students' perspectives on vandalism of religious symbols ($\beta = 0.447$) and has a very strong effect on religious tolerance ($\beta = 0.786$). Religious tolerance also significantly affects students' perspectives ($\beta = 0.375$). These findings underscore the role of tolerance and interfaith understanding in shaping attitudes toward intolerance. The study implies the need for higher education to strengthen tolerance education, enhance diversity literacy, and integrate pluralism values into curricula. Universities are encouraged to create spaces for interreligious dialogue to foster students who think critically, humanistically, and with respect for diversity.

KEYWORDS: Religious tolerance, interfaith understanding, intolerance, religious symbols, students.

A. INTRODUCTION

The socio religious life of Indonesia is shaped by its extraordinary diversity, where religion, culture, and language coexist within a shared national space. However, this diversity also brings its own dynamics and tensions. In many cases, the values of tolerance expected to serve as a bridge between religious communities are often tested by exclusivism, discriminatory practices, and even symbolic violence carried out in the name of belief. This phenomenon reflects that, although Indonesia legally guarantees freedom of religion, the social reality still falls short of that ideal. Cases of intolerance, such as the rejection of places of worship and the destruction of religious symbols, reveal that social cohesion within diversity remains vulnerable to disruption[1].

Social factors such as education, age, place of residence, and the intensity of intergroup interaction strongly influence individual acceptance of diversity. Urban communities, which are accustomed to encountering diversity, tend to be more open and tolerant compared to those living in homogeneous environments with limited opportunities for cross identity encounters[2]. Unfortunately, religious minorities and adherents of indigenous beliefs still frequently face injustices, both socially and administratively. This reality demonstrates that moderation efforts cannot remain at the policy level alone but must penetrate collective consciousness and social culture more deeply[3].

Nevertheless, hope emerges from local wisdom embedded in Indonesian society. Values such as *si tou timou tumou tou* in Minahasa, *torang samua basudara* in Maluku, and traditions of coexistence in Lampung and Palembang illustrate that harmony has long been part of the nation's cultural heritage[4]. Interfaith initiatives, the active roles of religious leaders, and tolerance education programs serve as essential resources to strengthen interreligious relations. In this context, building dialogue spaces and expanding interfaith understanding particularly among youth and university students becomes a strategic step that is not only academically relevant but also essential for the future of Indonesia's diversity[5].

Destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan, Bantul, in mid May 2025 once again highlighted the fragility of public tolerance toward religious symbols. A viral video, including clips from an Instagram reel, showed how grave markers in the form of crosses at Ngentak Public Cemetery, Banguntapan, were deliberately toppled by an unidentified perpetrator. The act resulted in damage to dozens of wooden and ceramic gravestones. Authorities responded by examining three witnesses and installing CCTV cameras at the site to identify the perpetrator. Subsequent investigation led to the arrest of a 16-year-old youth, identified as A, who admitted to destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan, as well as carrying out similar actions at Jaranan Cemetery, Sewon,

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and cemeteries in Kotagede, Yogyakarta. The arrest was made based on CCTV evidence and matching details of the suspect's motorcycle and clothing during the incidents. Although the act was not categorized as a case of religious intolerance since the perpetrator himself was a Christian investigators examined the possibility of mental health issues or personal problems as contributing factors.

The Banguntapan case illustrates the persistence of symbolic intolerance in Indonesia's public sphere. Although the perpetrator was not religiously motivated, destructive acts against religious symbols still caused social wounds and heightened concerns over the fragility of respect for diversity. Strong reactions emerged from religious leaders, civil society organizations, and academics, who argued that the incident should not be dismissed as an individual act but rather seen as a collective failure to build a safe public space for religious expression. For many students, particularly those enrolled in Public Universities (PU) and Islamic Religious Universities (IRU), this incident serves as a reflection on the importance of interfaith education that addresses not only cognitive dimensions but also the affective and ethical aspects of living in a plural society.

University students occupy a strategic position as agents of change in society, especially in fostering tolerance and preventing the spread of radicalism within campus environments. This role is not formed instantly but is shaped by various factors, including curricula, character building practices, and the availability of interfaith dialogue opportunities on campus. Students who internalize moderation values such as inclusivity, tolerance, and the ability to engage in dialogue across differences tend to show mutual respect, reject symbolic violence, and act as bridges between groups of different religious and cultural backgrounds[6]. Current studies indicate that most Indonesian students lean toward pluralist and inclusive attitudes, meaning they are willing to embrace diversity without losing commitment to their personal beliefs[7].

Moderation education is not only delivered through classroom theory but also through practical activities such as group counseling, interactive discussions, and inter-organizational collaboration. Such interventions have proven effective in strengthening students' commitment to national values, tolerance, and self control, while simultaneously reducing the potential for identity based discrimination[8]. An inclusive campus environment that encourages openness to diversity is a crucial factor in shaping students as peacebuilders. However, challenges persist in the form of hoaxes, hate speech, and intolerant narratives that spread widely through digital media. Therefore, moderation education must be developed responsively and sustainably so that students can truly fulfill their role as social change agents who uphold universal human values[9].

Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities represent two distinct higher education entities with different characteristics and approaches in shaping students' understanding of social and religious diversity. Public Universities generally operate in more plural and inclusive environments, with students coming from various religious, cultural, and regional backgrounds. This situation fosters open interaction and enriches cross identity understanding. Public Universities also cover a wider academic scope, including sciences, technology, humanities, and social sciences, making their approach to religious issues more neutral or interdisciplinary. Conversely, Islamic Religious Universities environments are relatively more religiously homogeneous, with strong orientations toward Islamic values in curricula, student activities, and campus culture. Islamic Religious Universities students are actively involved in spiritual and academic practices that deepen Islamic teachings, which shapes their responses to socio-religious issues through theological and moral frameworks.

Interestingly, these differing approaches also affect students' capacities for resilience, measured through the Adversity Quotient (AQ). Islamic Religious Universities students scored higher in AQ (153.78) compared to public universities students (142.23), indicating that statistically they are better prepared to face academic and social challenges. Both groups predominantly fall under the "transition climbers" category resilient individuals still in the process of growth while none were classified as "quitters," suggesting that both public universities and Islamic Religious Universities successfully foster resilient student characters[10]. These differences imply that the strong religious environment in Islamic Religious Universities contributes to high personal resilience, while the plural environment in public universities fosters adaptability and cross-cultural interaction skills. Each provides unique strengths relevant to shaping students' perspectives on complex issues such as intolerance and the destruction of religious symbols.

Although tolerance and interfaith understanding have been widely discussed in academic literature, studies that specifically compare public universities and Islamic Religious Universities students' perspectives on real cases of intolerance remain limited. Most research focuses on one type of institution or addresses moderation values normatively without linking them to actual social events. In Indonesia's socio-political context frequently marked by religious identity tensions mapping student responses across different educational backgrounds is crucial to understanding how higher education contributes to shaping attitudes toward diversity. The destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan represents a contemporary case that has raised public concern and provides a reflective moment to assess how deeply tolerance and interfaith values are embedded among the younger generation.

This study is significant not only in enriching academic literature on tolerance education in Indonesia but also as a foundation for formulating strategic policies in developing religious moderation curricula in higher education. Comparing public universities and Islamic Religious Universities students offers new insights into how educational environments shape perspectives on sensitive religious issues. Furthermore, the findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for educational institutions,

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government, and civil society in designing more contextual and effective approaches to tolerance education. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to comparatively analyze the influence of tolerance and interfaith understanding on the perspectives of public universities and Islamic Religious Universities students regarding the case destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan.

B. METHODS

This study employed a mixed methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative strategies to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The quantitative approach was used to analyze the influence of religious tolerance (X1) and interfaith understanding (X2) on students' perspectives regarding the vandalism of religious symbols (Y). Meanwhile, the qualitative approach was applied to interpret the meanings behind students' responses and to explore the social and religious dynamics that could not be fully captured through statistical data.

The data consisted of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire administered in June 2025. A total of 64 students participated as respondents, comprising a combination of students from Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities (located in Yogyakarta and its surrounding areas. Secondary data were obtained from case documentation, online news articles, social media reports, and academic literature related to religious intolerance, with particular attention to the destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan. The research instrument was developed based on the following indicators:

Table 1 Research Variables and Dimensions

Variable/Construct	Variable Code	Dimension
Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	PKA1	Evaluation of the act
	PKA2	Condemnation of the act
	PKA3	Right to religious freedom
	PKA4	Solusi atas konflik keagamaan
Religious Tolerance (X1)	TBA1	Solutions to religious conflicts
	TBA2	Acceptance of places of worship
	TBA3	Respect for other religious holidays
	TBA4	Dialogue and interfaith interaction
	TBA5	Rejection of violence in the name of religion
Interfaith Understanding (X2)	PSA1	Knowledge of basic teachings
	PSA2	Universal values across religions
	PSA3	Understanding of religious symbols
	PSA4	Experiences of interfaith interaction

Each indicator was measured using a five-point Likert scale: (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree).

Quantitative data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) with the assistance of SmartPLS software. This analytical approach was selected because it is appropriate for small sample sizes (<100) and is capable of simultaneously measuring the relationships between latent variables and their indicators. The analysis procedures included: testing for convergent and discriminant validity, assessing composite reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, evaluating the structural model (inner model) to examine the direct effects among variables, and conducting bootstrapping to determine the significance of relationships between constructs[11]. Meanwhile, qualitative data were analyzed through thematic interpretation of students' open ended responses and media documentation, aimed at reinforcing the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

C. RESULTS

Table 2 Respondents' Characteristics

Respondent Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	26	40%
	Female	38	60%
Type of Higher Education Institution	Public University	32	50%
	Islamic Religious University	32	50%
Age	19	21	33%
	20	18	28%

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	21	11	17%
	22	11	17%
	23	3	6%
Total Respondents		64	100%

Source: Primary Data

The respondents in this study consisted of 64 students, proportionally divided by type of higher education institution, with 50% from Public Universities and 50% from Islamic Religious Universities Islamic Religious Universities. In terms of gender, the majority were female (60%), while male respondents accounted for 40%. Regarding age, the largest group was 19 years old (33%), followed by 20 years old (28%), while respondents aged 21 and 22 years each represented 17%, and the remaining 6% were 23 years old. This composition reflects the diversity of respondents in terms of age and institutional background, which is relevant for examining differences in perspectives on tolerance and interfaith understanding.

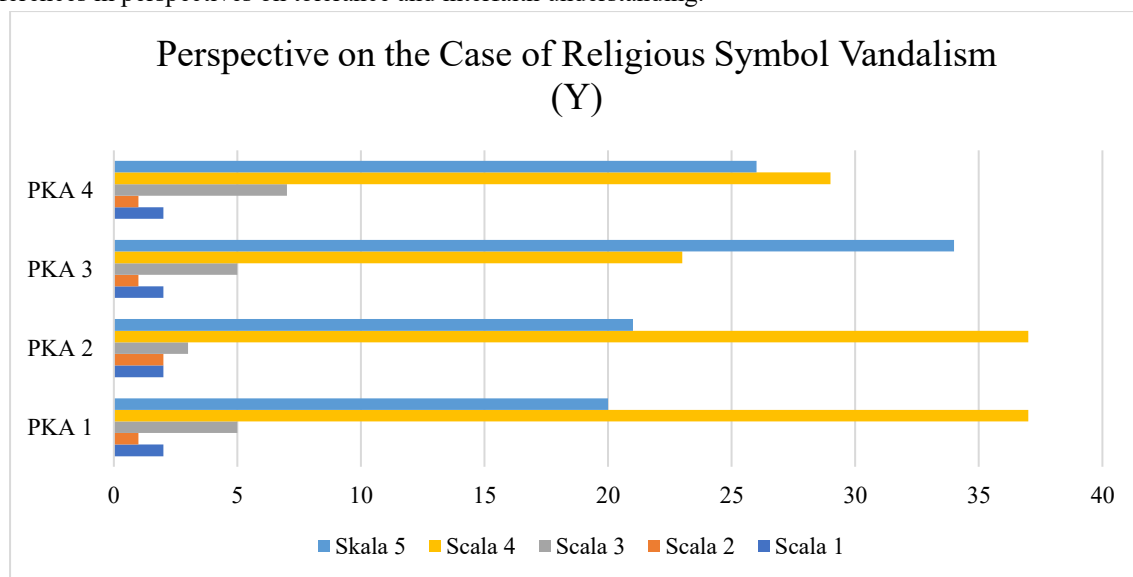


Figure 1 Distribution of Responses on Perspectives toward Religious Symbol Vandalism

Most respondents expressed a positive perspective regarding the case of religious symbol vandalism, as reflected in the predominance of scores 4 and 5 across all four indicators. For indicator PKA1 (assessment of intolerant actions) and PKA2 (condemnation of such actions), 37 respondents selected scale 4, while 20–21 respondents selected scale 5, demonstrating a critical stance against intolerant behavior. For PKA3 (the right to religious freedom), as many as 34 respondents selected scale 5, indicating strong recognition of individuals' rights to practice their faith. Similarly, PKA4 (solutions to religious conflicts) showed a constructive tendency, with 29 respondents choosing scale 4 and 26 selecting scale 5, highlighting support for interfaith dialogue as a solution. Thus, the majority of respondents not only rejected religion based violence but also supported peaceful and inclusive approaches in addressing religious conflicts.

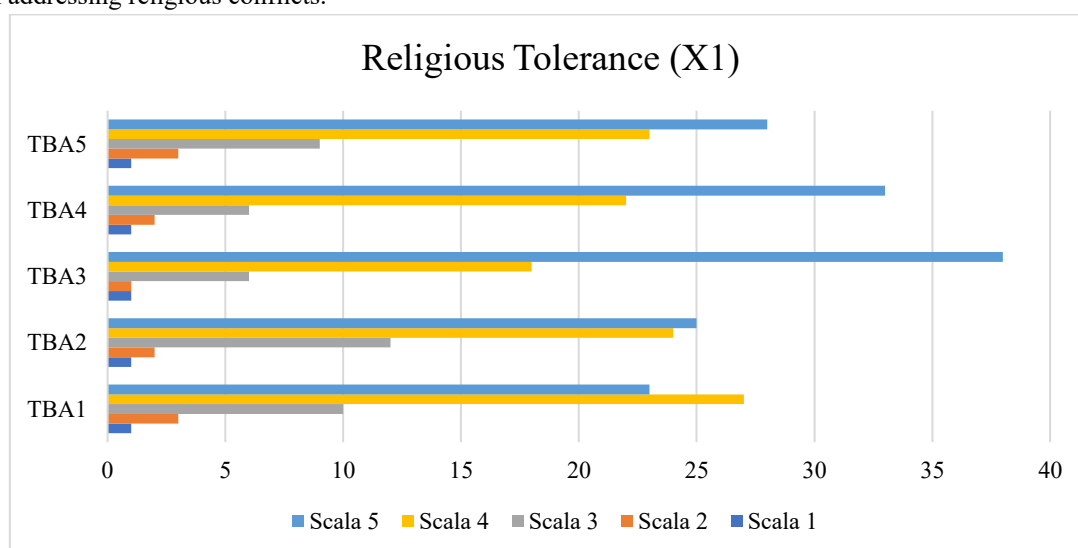


Figure 2 Distribution of Responses on Religious Tolerance

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In general, the data indicate that the majority of respondents demonstrated a high level of interfaith understanding, as reflected in the predominance of scores 4 and 5 across all indicators. For indicator TBA1 (knowledge of basic teachings of other religions), 30 respondents selected scale 4 and 23 selected scale 5, reflecting a solid understanding of other religious teachings. TBA 2 (universal values across religions) recorded the highest response, with 34 respondents selecting score 5, indicating a strong belief that all religions embody humanistic values. TBA 3 (understanding of religious symbols) also showed a positive trend, with 31 respondents on scale 4 and 23 on scale 5, reflecting awareness of the significance of other religious symbols. For TBA 4 (experience of interfaith interaction), 29 respondents gave a score of 4 and 20 a score of 5, highlighting their involvement in interfaith activities. These findings suggest that students possess a strong interfaith understanding, not only cognitively but also through real life experiences, which potentially strengthens tolerant attitudes in responding to religious issues in society.

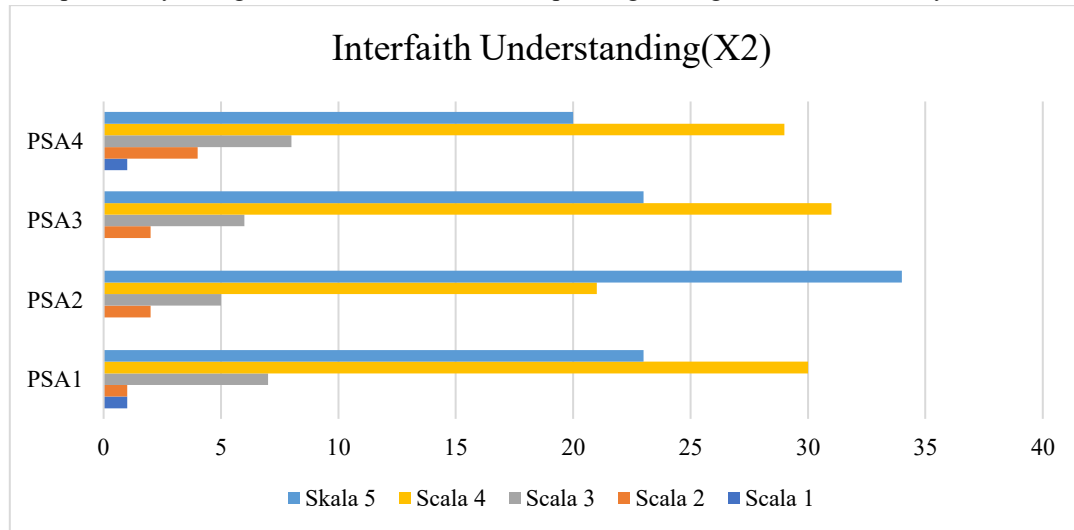


Figure 3 Distribution of Responses on Interfaith Understanding

Overall, the data indicate that the majority of respondents demonstrated a relatively high level of interfaith understanding, as reflected in the predominance of scores 4 and 5 across all indicators. For PSA1 (knowledge of the basic teachings of other faiths), 30 respondents selected scale 4 and 23 selected scale 5, indicating a solid understanding of the core teachings of other faiths. PSA2 (universal values across religions) recorded the highest response, with 34 respondents assigning a score of 5, reflecting a strong belief in the humanistic values inherent in all religions. PSA3 (understanding of religious symbols) also showed positive results, with 31 respondents selecting scale 4 and 23 selecting scale 5, demonstrating a sufficient comprehension of the meanings of religious symbols from other faiths. Meanwhile, PSA4 (experience of interfaith interaction) reflected students' active involvement in interfaith activities, as evidenced by 29 respondents selecting scale 4 and 20 selecting scale 5. These findings suggest that students' interfaith understanding is not merely theoretical but is also reinforced by lived experiences and constructive beliefs, contributing to the development of an inclusive and peaceful coexistence.

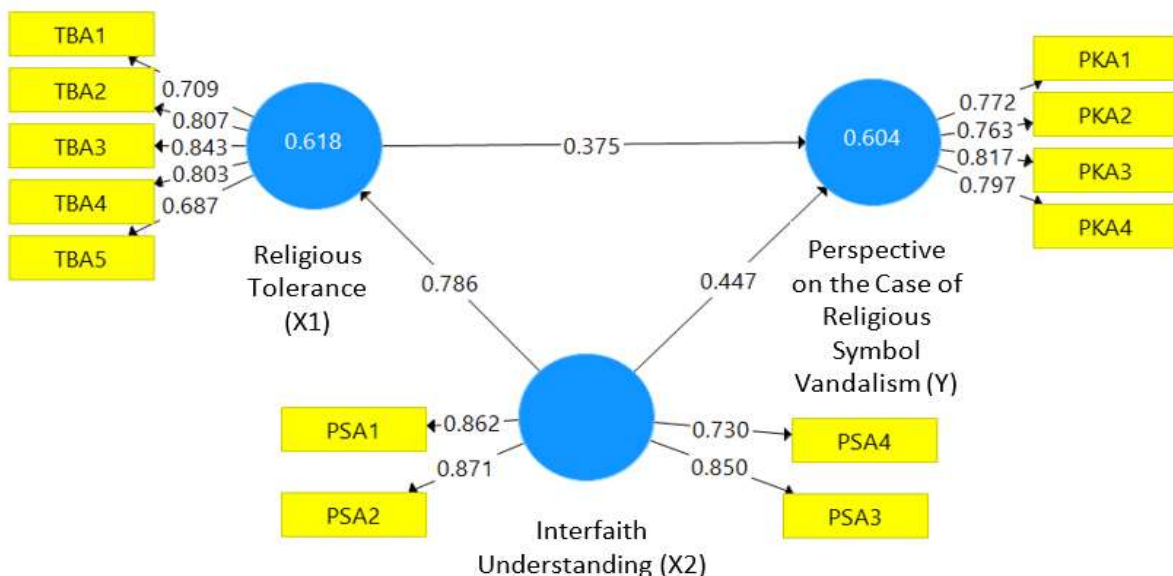


Figure 4 SEM Model with Loading Factor Values

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All indicators in the model show loading factor values above 0.6, indicating that they pass the convergent validity test and can be used in measuring the constructs. The highest loading value is found in PSA2 (0.871), while the lowest is in TBA5 (0.687), though still within acceptable limits. Thus, all latent variables (X1, X2, Y) are statistically confirmed to have valid indicators.

Table 3 Construct Reliability and Validity

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Interfaith understanding (X2)	0,849	0,870	0,898	0,689
Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	0,796	0,799	0,867	0,620
Religious Tolerance (X1)	0,830	0,848	0,880	0,596

Source: Primary data processed

The results of construct reliability and validity testing show that all three variables have Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values above 0.7, indicating strong internal reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each variable also exceed 0.5 (X1 = 0.596; X2 = 0.689; Y = 0.620), confirming convergent validity and demonstrating that the indicators adequately explain the latent variables. Hence, the instruments used in this study are both valid and reliable for SEM-PLS analysis.

Table 4 Fornell-Larcker Criterion

	Interfaith Understanding (X2)	Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	Religious Tolerance (X1)
Interfaith Understanding (X2)	0,830		
Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	0,742	0,788	
Religious Tolerance (X1)	0,786	0,726	0,772

Source: Primary data processed

Based on the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, all constructs in the model fulfill the requirements for discriminant validity. This is shown by the diagonal values (square roots of AVE) for each variable being higher than their correlations with other constructs for instance, the value of 0.830 for Interfaith Understanding is higher than its correlations with other variables (0.742 and 0.786). This result indicates that each construct is clearly distinguishable from the others in the model, thereby establishing adequate discriminant validity.

Table 5 R square

	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	0,604	0,591
Religious Tolerance (X1)	0,618	0,612

Source: Primary data processed

The R Square value of 0.604 for the variable Perspective on Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y) indicates that 60.4% of its variability can be explained by Religious Tolerance (X1) and Interfaith Understanding (X2). Meanwhile, the R Square value of 0.618 for Religious Tolerance (X1) demonstrates that this construct is strongly explained by Interfaith Understanding (X2). These values suggest that the model possesses strong explanatory power.

Table 6 Model_Fit

	Saturated Model	Estimated Model
SRMR	0,098	0,098
d_ ULS	0,878	0,878
d_ G	0,466	0,466
Chi-Square	156,014	156,014
NFI	0,706	0,706

Source: Primary data processed

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The model fit test results show that the SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual) value of 0.098 remains below the maximum threshold of 0.10, indicating that the model is acceptable. The Chi-Square value of 156.014 and the NFI (Normed Fit Index) value of 0.706 suggest a moderate level of fit, as $NFI > 0.7$ reflects an acceptable, though not optimal, model fit. The equality of d_{ULS} and d_G values between the saturated and estimated models (0.878 and 0.466, respectively) further indicates the stability of the model's structure. Overall, the model can be considered fit and suitable for further analysis.

Table 7 Q square

	SSO	SSE	Q ² (=1-SSE/SSO)
Interfaith understanding (X2)	256,000	256,000	
Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	256,000	173,379	0,323
Religious Tolerance (X1)	320,000	222,802	0,304

Source: Primary data processed

The Q² values for Perspective on Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y) (0.323) and Religious Tolerance (X1) (0.304) are both above 0.25, suggesting that the model has strong predictive relevance. Meanwhile, the Q² value for Interfaith Understanding (X2) is not calculated since it functions as an exogenous variable. This result confirms that the model is predictively relevant and reliable for projecting the behavior of dependent variables.

Table 8 Test of Variable Influence

	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Interfaith understanding (X2) -> Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	0,447	0,445	0,115	3,897	0,000
Interfaith understanding (X2) -> Religious Tolerance (X1)	0,786	0,777	0,070	11,166	0,000
Religious Tolerance (X1) -> Perspective on the Case of Religious Symbol Vandalism (Y)	0,375	0,347	0,182	2,057	0,040

Source: Primary data processed

The path analysis results indicate that all relationships among variables are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The effect of Interfaith Understanding (X2) on Perspective (Y) is significant ($\beta = 0.447$; $t = 3.897$; $p = 0.000$). Similarly, the influence of X2 on Religious Tolerance (X1) is very strong ($\beta = 0.786$; $t = 11.166$). Meanwhile, the influence of Religious Tolerance (X1) on Perspective (Y) is also significant, though more moderate ($\beta = 0.375$; $t = 2.057$; $p = 0.040$). These findings demonstrate that both independent variables contribute significantly to shaping perspectives on the case of religious symbol vandalism.

D. DISCUSSION

1. The Influence of Interfaith Understanding on Religious Tolerance

The findings of this study indicate that interfaith understanding has a strong influence on religious tolerance. Among Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities students, the higher their knowledge of other religions' teachings and their involvement in interfaith interactions, the stronger their attitudes of mutual respect and rejection of violence in the name of religion. This is reflected in the significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.786$; $p < 0.001$), which demonstrates a strong and consistent effect of interfaith understanding on tolerant attitudes.

These findings are consistent with studies by [12], [13], [14], which revealed that interfaith dialogue and daily interactions both in social life and in educational institutions are effective in shaping empathy, openness, and respect for differences. For instance, interfaith encounters among women in traditional markets or interfaith community activities on campus serve as fertile ground for building solidarity across religious identities. Inclusive education and the role of family also play a significant role in fostering interfaith understanding[15]. highlighted how families with different religious backgrounds can instill tolerance values internally.

The present study also finds that students with interfaith interaction experiences (PSA4) scored higher in tolerance than those without such experiences. Nevertheless, as emphasized by[12], [16], challenges remain, such as homogeneous social environments, religious exclusivism, and the lack of structured interfaith programs. Hence, this study underscores the importance

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of interfaith education interventions and the strengthening of interfaith dialogue, including through digital media that can effectively engage younger generations[17]. Thus, the findings are not only statistically robust but also reinforce the broader scholarly consensus that interfaith understanding is a fundamental pillar in building a tolerant society. Knowledge, lived experience, and interfaith encounters serve as vital social capital in mitigating the rising vulnerability to intolerance in the public sphere.

2. The Influence of Interfaith Understanding on Perspectives Regarding Religious Symbol Vandalism

The study further demonstrates that interfaith understanding significantly shapes students' perspectives on cases of religious symbol vandalism. Students with higher levels of interfaith comprehension regarding values, meanings, and teachings across religions tend to reject acts of intolerance and favor resolution through dialogue and mutual respect. This is supported by a strong and significant direct effect ($\beta = 0.447$; $t = 3.897$; $p = 0.000$).

This finding aligns with [18], who emphasized that religious symbols hold a sacred position within the theological and cultural frameworks of each religion. The desecration of such symbols not only injures the faith community but also threatens interreligious relations. In Mircea Eliade's framework, religious symbols are manifestations of the "sacred," and respecting them is integral to genuine interfaith encounters.

Other studies also highlight that individuals with low interfaith understanding are more likely to react defensively and engage in conflict, whereas those with higher interfaith understanding tend to respond with empathy, dialogue, and mutual care. In this context, interfaith understanding is not merely cognitive knowledge but also reflects spiritual maturity and a commitment to peaceful coexistence in plural societies. Accordingly, this study strengthens the argument that interfaith education, symbolic dialogue, and diversity literacy must be fostered within both Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities. Embedding these values is not only crucial for preventing intolerance, such as religious symbol vandalism, but also serves as a long-term strategy for building a just, peaceful, and dignified society that respects the religious identity of every individual.

3. The Influence of Religious Tolerance on Perspectives Regarding Religious Symbol Vandalism

The results indicate that religious tolerance has a significant influence on students' perspectives regarding cases of religious symbol vandalism. Students who demonstrate tolerant attitudes such as accepting the presence of other religious houses of worship, respecting religious celebrations, and rejecting all forms of violence in the name of religion tend to have more critical, peaceful, and just perspectives toward incidents of intolerance, including the destruction of religious symbols. This finding confirms that tolerance is not merely a normative concept, but a lived value that is actualized in concrete attitudes toward issues of harmony and diversity. The statistical results further reinforce this conclusion, as the effect was significant at $p < 0.05$.

These findings support a broader body of global research that consistently highlights the role of religious tolerance in shaping individual attitudes toward religious symbol vandalism. In this regard, tolerance functions not only as a passive stance of accepting difference but as an active practice of respecting, accommodating, and nurturing diverse religious expressions in public life. When tolerance values are deeply rooted in society, the likelihood of conflict arising from religious symbols tends to diminish.

Studies by [19], [20] consistently show that religious symbols are often highly sensitive points in identity based conflicts, particularly in societies lacking strong foundations of tolerance and pluralism. In such contexts, religious symbols may be politicized, interpreted as threats to group dominance, and ultimately lead to destructive actions. This dynamic is also evident in Indonesia, where acts of religious symbol vandalism reflect a crisis of tolerance values and a failure of productive interfaith dialogue.

Research by [21], [22], supports interfaith dialogue and accommodation as the most effective solutions, emphasizing that tolerance fostered through multicultural education and interreligious interaction reduces social suspicion, strengthens social cohesion, and diminishes discriminatory acts against religious symbols. In this sense, religious tolerance functions not only as an ethical norm but also as a social mechanism that maintains stability and coexistence in plural societies. Moreover, tolerance shapes the way individuals interpret religious conflicts. Tolerant interpretations of religious symbols foster inclusive value systems, thereby creating social orientations that are more open, egalitarian, and peace oriented. These insights resonate with the present study's findings, which show that students with high levels of tolerance are more likely to view religious symbol vandalism as morally wrong and to advocate for peaceful and educational responses.

Thus, this study aligns with international literature, affirming that religious tolerance is a key variable in shaping social perspectives on religious conflicts, especially regarding symbols. Strengthening tolerance through education, inclusive policies, and interfaith forums must therefore be prioritized, so that society not only rejects violence but also becomes an active guardian of social harmony within religious diversity.

4. Student Responses to Religious Symbol Vandalism

Based on respondents' statements, perspectives on the cross vandalism case in Banguntapan generally reflected deep concern and strong rejection of intolerance. Many respondents perceived the act as a violation of diversity values and inconsistent with the spirit of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika. Several explicitly described it as both a criminal and intolerant act, disrupting social

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harmony and dishonoring religious symbols that deserve respect, particularly within the sacred context of Christian/Catholic burial grounds.

Respondents also emphasized that a lack of interfaith education and understanding, alongside possible influences of radical ideologies, were major drivers behind such incidents. A clear and consistent message emerged: every individual has the right to practice their religion peacefully, including through the public display of religious symbols in spaces such as cemeteries. Society, they argued, must learn to coexist respectfully and honor religious differences.

As possible solutions, respondents suggested:

1. Law enforcement against perpetrators as a form of social justice.
2. Early education on tolerance and interfaith understanding to shape inclusive attitudes.
3. Peace oriented religious preaching rooted in morality, wisdom, and justice.
4. Strengthening the role of religious leaders and civil society in fostering dialogue and protecting minority groups.

Accordingly, this incident serves as an important reflection point for all stakeholders to strengthen literacy in tolerance and safeguard peace within Indonesia's multicultural society.

E. CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively analyzed the influence of religious tolerance and interfaith understanding on Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities students' perspectives regarding the destruction of cross tombstones in Banguntapan. The findings demonstrate that both religious tolerance and interfaith understanding significantly and positively affect how students respond to acts of intolerance toward religious symbols. Students with higher levels of tolerance and stronger interfaith knowledge and experience tend to adopt more critical, peaceful, and rights oriented perspectives, affirming religious freedom. This shows that tolerance and interfaith understanding are not only ideal values but also play an active role in shaping fair and constructive social attitudes within diversity. Comparisons between Public Universities and Islamic Religious Universities students further illustrate that the educational environment plays a crucial role in shaping perspectives on diversity. Academic settings that are open, interactive, and dialogical strengthen students' sensitivity toward religious and social issues.

The implications of this research highlight the importance of integrating tolerance and interfaith understanding into higher education curricula. Universities should provide more interfaith dialogue opportunities, embed multicultural education into teaching, and facilitate cross group interactions as part of student character formation. Additionally, the results can inform policymakers, religious institutions, and civil society organizations in designing preventive strategies against intolerance by fostering values of diversity and civic virtue among younger generations. Higher education, therefore, can serve as a transformative agent in building a more tolerant, just, and peaceful society.

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