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Strengthening Religious Moderation through the Merdeka Student Exchange Program (PMM) at Padang State University

Author:

Rido Putra¹
Ahmad Rivauzi²
Nafsan Nafsan³
Indil Setiawan⁴
Lailatul Chomariah⁵

Affiliation:

^{1,2} Universitas Negeri
Padang, Indonesia

³ Universitas Islam Negeri
Imam Bonjol Padang,
Indonesia

⁴ Magistra Indonesia,
Indonesia

⁵ Universitas
Muhammadiyah Jakarta,
Indonesia

Corresponding author:

Rido Putra,
ridoputra@fis.unp.ac.id

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Abstract

One of the strategic steps to realize religious moderation is through the Merdeka Student Exchange program abbreviated as PMM. The purpose of this research is to analyze and describe how the process of strengthening religious moderation through the PMM program at Padang State University. Religious moderation based on the PMM program is a point of emphasis and an aspect of novelty that has not been revealed in previous research. This research is a field research using qualitative methods. The results found that strengthening religious moderation in PMM students was carried out in three stages: First, the Module Lecturer compiles the logical framework of the Nusantara Module as a reference in carrying out 16 module activities consisting of 8 diversity activities, 2 inspiration activities, 5 reflection activities, and 1 social contribution activity. Second, to strengthen PMM students' understanding of religious moderation, the PMM UNP implementation team organized various activities including learning to get along with the limau baronggeh customary tradition, visiting minority communities in Padang, learning local wisdom with religious and traditional leaders of Kubu Gadang Village. Third, the contribution of Padang State University in strengthening the religious moderation of PMM students is in the form of inserting moderation values in each activity, providing maximum service to all religious believers, and facilitating various activities that support the strengthening of religious moderation.

Keywords:

Merdeka Student Exchange; PMM; Padang State University; Religious Moderation.

Abstrak

Salah satu langkah strategis mewujudkan moderasi beragama adalah melalui program Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka atau disingkat dengan PMM. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah menganalisa serta mendeskripsikan bagaimana proses penguatan moderasi beragama melalui program PMM yang terdapat di Universitas Negeri Padang. Moderasi beragama berbasis program PMM merupakan titik tekan dan aspek kebaruan yang belum diungkap dalam penelitian sebelumnya. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian lapangan dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa penguatan moderasi beragama pada mahasiswa PMM dilakukan dalam tiga tahap: Pertama, Dosen Modul menyusun kerangka logis Modul Nusantara sebagai acuan dalam menjalankan 16 kegiatan modul yang terdiri dari 8 kegiatan kebhinekaan, 2 kegiatan inspirasi, 5 kegiatan refleksi, dan 1 kegiatan kontribusi sosial. Kedua, untuk menguatkan pemahaman mahasiswa PMM tentang moderasi beragama, tim pelaksana PMM UNP menyelenggarakan berbagai kegiatan di antaranya: belajar rukun dari tradisi adat limau baronggeh, kunjungan ke masyarakat minoritas kota Padang, belajar kearifan lokal bersama tokoh agama dan adat Desa Kubu Gadang. Ketiga, kontribusi Universitas Negeri Padang dalam menguatkan moderasi beragama mahasiswa PMM berupa penginsersian nilai-nilai moderasi pada tiap kegiatan, memberikan pelayanan maksimal kepada semua pemeluk agama, serta memfasilitasi berbagai kegiatan yang mendukung penguatan moderasi beragama.

Kata Kunci:

Moderasi Beragama; Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka; PMM; Universitas Negeri Padang.

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Introduction

Within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, strengthening religious moderation is an urgent matter to be addressed. Remember, religion is an important element that gives birth to civilization and serves as the main pillar supporting this nation. Almost no great civilization is free from the role and influence of religion. The values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, anti-violence, national commitment, accommodation of local cultures, and prioritizing the unity and oneness of the community, are fundamental assets in creating harmony in national life. A need to instill values of moderation in every religion due to the potential for radicalism among its followers, regardless of their faith (Saputra, Putra, and Putri n.d.; Anggraeni et al., 2023).

The need for the role and contribution of students in promoting the values of moderation is quite strong. However, there is still not much-supporting literature to strengthen the position and contribution of students as a moderate generation. Strengthening religious moderation is an urgent and pressing task to be undertaken. One of the opportunities to strengthen religious moderation is through the Merdeka Student Exchange Program (PMM) organized by universities under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The Merdeka Student Exchange Program is a program that invites students to gain learning experiences at the best universities across Indonesia. In this program, students meet various other students from different ethnicities, languages, religions, and cultures (Wijayanto et al. 2023).

The discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia officially began on October 18, 2019, which later became known as "Religious Moderation Day" (Junaidi 2019). Religious moderation promoted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has three important concepts: moderation of thought, moderation of movement, and moderation of action. The concept of moderate religious thought is an ability to integrate text and context in practicing religion. Religious moderation in the form of a movement is based on the principle of correcting what is not following religious teachings to invite goodness and avoid wrongdoing. Meanwhile, religious moderation in tradition and religious practice, namely strengthening the relationship between religion and the traditions and culture of society (Massoweang 2020). Religious moderation is an attitude, perspective, and practice of religion that prioritizes aspects of humanity and welfare.

In the context of religious moderation, strengthening religious moderation refers to efforts to reinforce and expand practices that prioritize tolerance, mutual respect, and humanity in religious observance. This involves a more inclusive approach, respecting differences, and promoting interfaith dialogue. With the strengthening of religious moderation, we strive to create a harmonious society where every individual can live together peacefully regardless of their religious background or beliefs. This is in line with Syafii Maarif's view that the essence of religion brings goodness to the entire universe (Rido Putra 2019).

To realize the strengthening of religious moderation among students, academics have conducted extensive research in various places and have discovered various best formulations for strengthening religious moderation among students. Among them is the research by Silfia Hanani and Nelmaya (2020) which discusses Strengthening Religious Moderation to Address Intolerance Among Campus Intellectuals. Strengthening religious moderation is carried out through moderation dialogue based on brotherhood, moderation literacy, and religious moderation house programs (Hanani and Nelmaya 2020).

M. Thoriquil Huda in 2021, in his research, examined the mainstreaming of religious moderation; strategies, challenges, and opportunities for FKUB East Java. The focus of the research is the efforts and strategies undertaken by the Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) in grounding religious moderation. The research results show several strategies implemented by FKUB in grounding religious moderation through the organization of discussion forums, the creation of guideline books, strengthening the awareness of the millennial generation, and establishing cooperation with relevant parties. Meanwhile, the challenges encountered include religious orthodoxy and conservatism, identity politics, and the development of social media. However, the main asset is the culture of the community, which is friendly, polite, and considerate (Huda 2021).

Nazil Mumtaz, et al. also study the strengthening of religious moderation with a focus on the perspective of development communication. In his research, Mumtaz analyzes communication strategies for religious development aimed at strengthening social harmony in campus community life. The Development Communication Strategy used in strengthening religious moderation includes training for lecturers and students, as well as research to implement strategies for societal improvement (Al-Mujtahid, Alfikri, and Sumanti 2022).

Ajahari, et al., researched the Implementation of the Religious Moderation Strengthening Policy (PMB) in the Curriculum of Religious Higher Education Institutions: (Case Study at IAIN, IAKN, and IAHN Tampung Penyang Palangkaraya). The research results show that the implementation of the religious moderation strengthening policy at IAIN, IAKN, and IAHN Palangkaraya is included in the curriculum and hidden curriculum of education. However, its implementation is still not optimal due to several factors such as the absence of SOP, limited resources, ineffective inter-agency communication, and uneven understanding among implementers (Ajahari et al. 2023). Previous relevant studies have attempted to provide an overview of the concept of strengthening religious moderation among students in addressing the continuously evolving challenges. However, these studies have not yet formulated the strengthening of religious moderation through the latest programs launched by the Ministry of Education, such as the Independent Student Exchange Program (PMM), which inherently has great potential as a means of strengthening religious moderation.

This article aims to explain the strengthening of religious moderation through the Merdeka Student Exchange (PMM) Program at Universitas Negeri Padang. Universitas Negeri Padang has the Nusantara Module Logical Framework as a guideline for implementing various activities to strengthen religious moderation. The article presents several formulated questions, namely: how is the process of strengthening religious moderation among PMM students at Universitas Negeri Padang? What efforts to strengthen religious moderation are provided by Universitas Negeri Padang to PMM students? Also, what is the contribution of Universitas Negeri Padang in strengthening religious moderation among PMM students?

Methods

This research is a field study using a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology investigates the essence and experiences of individuals, which are then interpreted to derive specific meanings (Muktaf 2016). Phenomenology is more oriented toward reality, understanding the meaning of an event and its relationship with individuals in certain situations, starting with silence to comprehend it (Usop 2019). The way to obtain research results using phenomenology is that the phenomenologist must strive to enter the subject's environment so that the researcher can

understand the meaning experienced by the research subject from events in their daily life (Rahardjo 2018). During the PMM program, the author was directly involved from the beginning to the end of the activity. The author's position in this program is as a Nusantara Module Lecturer who is in charge of accompanying students in participating in activities. The author's involvement certainly provides a deep understanding of the research subject.

The focus of research in phenomenological studies is twofold: *First*, Textual description: what the research subjects experience regarding a phenomenon. What is experienced is the objective aspect, the data obtained is factual, and it occurs empirically. *Second*, Structural description: how the subjects experience and interpret their experiences. This explanation contains subjective aspects. This aspect involves the opinions, judgments, feelings, expectations, and other subjective responses of the research subjects related to their experiences (Nuryana, Pawito, and Utari 2019).

The data collection technique in this phenomenological approach is by depth interview (in-depth interview) with the research subject. In this case, the author of the interview is the Nusantara Module Lecturer and Liaison Officer. The interview was recorded using the author's cellphone, to get complete interview results. To complement the data, in-depth observations were also conducted, tracing various documents such as photos of activities, Nusantara Module Logical Framework documents, videos of activities, and others. Interviews and observations with research subjects were carried out at Padang State University which received participants in the Merdeka Student Exchange program (PMM). As for document searches, they were carried out in several places, namely the UNP Information and Service Center.

Results

The strengthening of religious moderation through the PMM program is carried out through the following three (3) stages:

Development of the Logical Framework of the Nusantara Module

The Nusantara Module logical framework is a guide that must be prepared by Nusantara Module Lecturers in carrying out inbound PMM activities. The Nusantara Module Logical Framework at Padang State University was compiled together and then discussed before being socialized to students. There are 16 module activities consisting of 8 diversity activities, 2 inspiration activities, 5 reflection activities, and 1 social contribution activity.

In the PMM 4 Program, a total of 16,250 students have been declared successful in the selection process and are exchanging to participate in lectures and the Nusantara Module at 128 recipient universities spread across 29 provinces in Indonesia (Dikti 2024). Meanwhile, the State University of Padang itself received 140 students from 72 public and private universities across Indonesia. Out of the 140, they were divided into 5 groups, each group accompanied by 1 lecturer and 1 Liaison Officer. The participants are quite diverse in terms of ethnicity, language, and religion.

In carrying out activities, lecturers and students must adhere to the Nusantara Module guidelines and the Nusantara Module Logical Framework that have been prepared by the module lecturers, so that the components of the Nusantara module can be implemented effectively and provide a comprehensive understanding of the activities carried out, such as building social cohesion through various activities like visits to religious communities, customary communities, and cultural center visits to enhance students' understanding of unity and diversity. The author will

summarize the Nusantara Module activities outlined in the Logical Framework, which has been implemented, in the following table. This table contains the activities' names, the activities' schedules, and the activities' descriptions.

Table 1. Nusantara Module Activities UNP Year 2024

No.	Week /Activity Date	Activity Name	Activity Description
1.	Week 2/February 18, 2024	Inspiration	The PMM4 Indbound UNP students listened to a presentation on Minangkabau culture, West Sumatra's traditional cuisine, Minangkabau customs, the beauty of West Sumatra, and the origin of the name Minangkabau before we explored the Minang realm during the PMM.
2.	Week 3/February 23, 2024	Kebhinekaan	The PMM4 Indbound UNP students visited Nagari Koto Sani X Koto Singkarak and gained insights and assignments according to their respective groups. Group 3 received material about the history and philosophy of the Panyalai tribe's rumah gadang, presented by the Datuak of the Panyalai tribe.
3.	Week 3/February 24, 2024	Refleksi	After the diversity activities, the students gathered at the badminton court to carry out the next activity, which was reflection. We listened to motivational talks from the Nusantara module lecturers and continued with a communal meal, which is a Minangkabau tradition.
4.	Week 3/February 25, 2024	Social Contribution	The PMM4 Indbound UNP students were divided into 2 groups to carry out social contribution activities. Group 1 is repairing the roads around the traditional house in Koto Solok, and Group 2 is working together to clean the Aia Angek hot spring and the mosque that is being renovated near the Aia Angek spring.
5.	Week 5/10 March 2024	Kebhinekaan	The PMM4 Indbound UNP students visited the Bungus Teluk Kabung sub-district office in Padang City to study one of the traditions of the Sungai Pisang community in Teluk Kabung, namely the limau baronggeh tradition in welcoming the month of Ramadan. We were also explained the elements and meanings contained.

6.	Week 14/11 May 2024	Kebhinekaan	The PMM4 Indbound UNP students participated in the Nusantara module activities after Ramadan, as the Nusantara module was not held previously. This time in the Nusantara module, we visited Istano Basa Pagaruyung, which is one of the historical remnants of the kingdom in West Sumatra. We study the history of the palace's establishment, as well as the meaning behind each of its architectural elements.
7.	Week 16/26 May 2024	Kebhinekaan	In this Nusantara module, each group has a different Nusantara module visit. Group 3 Galamai visited the residence of Bundo Kandung located behind the Grand Mosque of West Sumatra. This Nusantara module activity includes the presentation of the history/origin of Bundo Kandung and related matters.
8.	Week 17/01 June 2024	Kebhinekaan	PMM4 UNP students participated in an archipelago module activity at one of West Sumatra's tourist attractions, Kubu Gadang, Padang Panjang. We learned about eating baradaik, at the residence of the ninik mamak in the traditional house of the Sikumbang tribe. Makan baradaik is a tradition of the Minang people when eating together in the room. We learned the manners and etiquette when eating baradaik and practiced them.
9.	Week 17/01 June 2024	Refleksi	After eating baradaik, the students continued their trip to Kubu Gadang. We learned how to make West Sumatran onde-onde. West Sumatra onde-onde is a culinary made from flour and brown sugar. This onde-onde is known as klepon, on the island of Java.
10.	Week 18 ke 18/08 June 2024	Kebhinekaan	Students visited the FK UNP auditorium in Bukittinggi to listen to material about mulok PKBAM which is applied in schools in Bukittinggi. This material was presented by Mrs. Suryanti Eka Putri the principal of SDN 01 Campago. In her presentation, she explained the advantages of implementing mulok PKBAM implementation in elementary schools in Bukittinggi.

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| 11. Week 18/09 June 2024 | Refleksi | Students gathered in front of the UNP rectorate building to carry out the archipelago module activity, namely reflection. This reflection is filled with discussing what lessons we learned in yesterday's activities and delivered by representatives of each group. And each group gave each other input. |
| 12. Week 19/15 June 2024 | Kebhinekaan | Students visited the Solok regent's office for an archipelago module activity to recognize the natural beauty of West Sumatra, especially Solok. We got new insights delivered by the Regent of Solok, Capt. H. Epyardi Asda, M.Mar dt. About the beauty of Solok Regency which has various lakes, mountains, and tourism in Solok Regency. |
| 13. Week 19/15 June 2024 | Inspirasi | In this Nusantara module, we listened to the presentation of material by Mr. Dicky Gunawan who is one of the entrepreneurs of one of the tourism in Alahan Panjang. We gained insight into the importance of tourism empowerment so that natural beauty is explored, and can also help the economy of residents and open up employment opportunities for the surrounding community. |
| 14. Week 19/16 June 2024 | Refleksi | In this archipelago module, students carry out the archipelago module in the form of reflection. This reflection is filled with playing games between groups. In this reflection, we were able to learn about the importance of cohesiveness between members to achieve the same goal, and the importance of discussion so that there are no differences of opinion and self-focus. |
| 15. Week 19/19 June 2024 | Kebhinekaan | Students participated in module activities in the form of diversity. This activity was filled with cultural festival activities by performing arts from PMM4 Indbound UNP students. Beginning with the PT defile show from each representative of the 72 sending PTs, dances from West Sumatra performed by PMM4 UNP students, dances from each region, and also the announcement of the winners |

		of the competition held by MBKM UNP which was attended by PMM4 UNP students.
		With the holding of this cultural festival event, it will soon end the activities of the student archipelago module at Padang State University.
16.	Week 19/20 June 2024	Refleksi
		From the various archipelago module activities that have been carried out, the last archipelago module activity arrived. The last Nusantara module was filled with reflections that discussed what lessons we learned while in West Sumatra, especially during our time at UNP. We also discussed things that we still did not understand, and held a quiz.

Strengthening Religious Moderation in PMM Students

The efforts made by Padang State University in strengthening PMM students' understanding of religious moderation, the PMM UNP implementation team organized various activities including learning to get along with the traditional limau baronggeh tradition in Teluk Kabung Bungus, visiting minority communities in Padang (ethnic Chinese), learning local wisdom with religious and traditional leaders of Kubu Gadang Village Padang Panjang.

Learning to Get Along with Each Other from the Limau Baronggeh Traditional Tradition

On Sunday, March 10, 2024, PMM 4 Indbound UNP students visited the Bungus Teluk Kabung sub-district office in Padang City to learn one of the traditions of the Sungai Pisang community, namely the limau baronggeh tradition in welcoming the month of Ramadan. The Limau Baronggeh Customary Tradition is a tradition that has been carried out by Pisang River residents since the past. This tradition is a form of strengthening the relationship between tribes and residents in Sungai Pisang. As well as to clean themselves before entering fasting.

This tradition is carried out in the afternoon, what needs to be prepared is to collect coconut leaves, then boil them until they are formed, as well as the preparation of lime juice and so on, which will later be paraded along the streets of the Pisang River area. The Balimau tradition begins with talempong accompaniment. The limes are then arranged on a red carpet. After all the community leaders are present, it is then paraded to the end of the road carried by 38 women consisting of Bundo Kandung as well as their children. After arriving, the limau baronggeh is again placed on the red carpet, then ends with a speech and the use of lime water.



Image 1. PMM Students Practice *Limau* Drafting

Visit to Minority Communities in Padang City

On Sunday 26/5/2024 PMM 4 students of Padang State University conducted an archipelago module activity at See Hien Kiong Temple in Padang City. This activity is part of the UNP Inbound PMM 4 archipelago module using observation and interview methods. This activity was attended by 140 students, accompanied by 5 module lecturers and 5 Liassion Officers. In addition, this activity was also attended by the PMM Center Management Team.

The activity began with the welcoming of Chinese art, namely Barongsai, which had previously won the 2024 World Barongsai Championship. The tradition of Barongsai ethnic Chinese in the city of Padang is not only part of the identity of ethnic Chinese but has become a color of multicultural culture in the city of Padang. Celebrations organized by several ethnic groups in the city of Padang have their characteristics so that over time they develop so that the culture becomes large and is widely recognized by the general public so that it becomes a distinctive identity (Deci 2021).



Image 2. Joint Photo of PMM Participants, Module Lecturers, HBT Management, and PMM Center Team

In this activity, Dr. Haryono, M.Com., Ak., CA as the leader of the central PMM Team said, that with this visit, students were able to learn the values of tolerance between religious communities in Indonesia. In addition, the academic director Dr. Remon Lapisa, ST, MT, M.Sc.Tech in his speech said that the Nusantara module at the Shee Hien Kiong Temple is a mandatory module that is carried out for every UNP Inbound PMM participant. This activity was also welcomed by the management and leadership of the Bersatu Teguh Association. The purpose of this activity is to increase the value of tolerance between religious communities for PMM participants and all those involved in the activity.

Learning Local Wisdom with Traditional and Religious Leaders

Saturday, June 1, 2024 PMM 4 Inbound students of Padang State University conducted an archipelago module at Kubu Gadang Padang Panjang Tourism Village. In this activity, students learn the traditions that are still maintained by the Minangkabau people which are still preserved by the Kubu Gadang community. Students learn the procession of eating bajamba and explore the meaning of each process of eating bajamba. In addition, students also learn traditional Minangkabau musical instruments.

One of the PMM participants, Lailatul Chomariah said “We learned about eating *baradaik*, at the residence of the ninik mamak in the Sikumbang tribe's traditional house. Eating *baradaik* is a Minang tradition when eating together in a room. We learned the manners and ethics when eating *baradaik* and practiced them.”



Image 3. The Practice of Eating Bajamba with Religious Leaders and Adat in Kubu Gadang Village

The existence of this visit can strengthen the tolerance attitude of plural students. Providing experience to students of cultural diversity. In addition, religious and traditional leaders, as well as the local community, also welcomed them without seeing the identity of the guest whether a Muslim or not. From this, we can conclude that Minangkabau society is very egalitarian.

Contribution of Padang State University

Padang State University contributes to strengthening the religious moderation of PMM students by inserting moderation values in each activity, providing maximum service to all religious believers, and facilitating various activities that support this.

Padang State University as the recipient university of PMM 4 students, has contributed a lot in organizing Nusantara Module activities, strengthening students' understanding and attitude

towards the importance of tolerance in diversity. Based on the author's observations while accompanying PMM students, the UNP PMM implementation team always slips moderation messages to students in each activity. Based on the author's interview with one of the Module Lecturers, Mr. Nofrion, he said:

"We as the PMM 4 UNP implementation team always provide the best service to students, facilitate student needs, and make students like their own children. For us, moderation in the midst of diversity is important. In every activity, we always convey that Minangkabau is an egalitarian society, moderate, friendly to diversity."

In addition to inserting moderation messages, the UNP PMM team also facilitates students' worship needs, providing various religious activities. When interviewing one of the Liaison Officers, Fachrur Rachman, he said "We as a team play an active role in serving and accompanying students to places of worship, such as mosques and churches." What UNP has done will have a positive impact on students so that they can strengthen their love for the country and a sense of unity that will eliminate the *chauvinism* of each student. In addition, UNP also contributes to providing experience and enthusiasm to students in voicing messages of moderation in diversity that has become *Sunnatullah*.

Discussion

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) launched four flagship programs, one of which is the policy on the opportunity to study for three semesters outside the study program, such as the Merdeka Student Exchange (PMM). Through this program, it is hoped that students will be able to strengthen and expand the scope of their competencies, both in knowledge and experience, as well as the significant opportunity for higher education institutions to establish and expand cooperation (Anon n.d.).

Student exchange programs are organized to cultivate several attitudes in students as outlined in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020, namely respecting cultural diversity, viewpoints, religions, and beliefs, as well as the opinions or original findings of others; and cooperating and having social sensitivity and concern for society and the environment. The objectives of the student exchange program are as follows: *First*, to study across campuses, live with families at the destination campus, enhance students' understanding of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, and strengthen brotherhood across cultures and ethnicities. *Second*, to build friendships among students from different regions, ethnicities, cultures, and religions, thereby fostering the spirit of national unity and integrity (Jenderal et al., 2020).

The State University of Padang, as one of the universities receiving students in this program, has prepared thoroughly to ensure the activities run smoothly. There are 16 module activities, of which 8 are diversity activities, 2 are inspiration activities, 5 are reflection activities, and 1 is a social contribution activity (Negeri et al. n.d.). From various activities that have been carried out, the author will outline several activities related to strengthening religious moderation among PMM 4 UNP students.

Logical Framework of the Nusantara Module

The Logical Framework of the Nusantara Module serves as a reference for implementing inbound PMM activities at each Higher Education Institution (HEI). The Logical Framework created by each HEI has its distinctive characteristics, following the local wisdom of the area where the campus is located. For example, at Padang State University, the theme "ABS-SBK, Alam

'Takambang Jadi Guru' was chosen. This theme emphasizes fostering pride in the diversity of national culture through the noble values of Minangkabau culture to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students. Module lecturers are free to determine activities that align with their preferences, but they must still be designed following the campus's nationalist image (Sholeh et al., n.d.).

The Nusantara Module activities offered in this program are intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of diversity, national insight, and love for the homeland, encompassing four types of activities: diversity, inspiration, reflection, and social contribution. These activities aim to enhance participants' awareness and understanding of the nation's diverse cultures within the framework of the unity of the Republic of Indonesia (Kerja Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka, n.d.).

Learning the Values of Moderation in Minangkabau Society

The *limau* is then rubbed on the face as a symbol of cleansing and ends with a prayer, then shaking hands and returning to their respective homes. From this tradition, PMM students learned about the importance of brotherhood. Amid diverse customs and traditions, many positive sides can strengthen brotherhood. This balimau procession involves many elements so that it can unravel the tensions that occur in social life. The existence of this visit can strengthen the tolerance attitude of plural students (Yulianti, Murtadho, & Hanafi, 2023). Providing experience to students of cultural diversity. In addition, religious and traditional leaders, as well as the local community, also welcomed them without seeing the identity of the guest whether a Muslim or not (Muslih, Anggraeni, & Ghoni, 2023). From this, we can conclude that Minangkabau society is very egalitarian.

For PMM students, participating in the Balimau tradition highlights the significance of unity amidst diverse customs and traditions. The symbolic act of cleansing represents a renewal of the self and the strengthening of relationships within the community. By engaging in this process, students witness firsthand how shared cultural practices can promote harmony and dissolve social tensions.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this tradition is the inclusive and egalitarian nature of the Minangkabau people. Religious and traditional leaders, alongside the local community, warmly welcome participants without regard to their religious backgrounds. This open-hearted approach demonstrates that cultural and religious diversity need not be a barrier but rather an opportunity to strengthen social bonds and mutual respect (Mukhoyyaroh & Yunus, 2023).

Through their involvement in the Balimau procession, PMM students gain valuable exposure to the richness of cultural diversity. This experience not only broadens their perspectives but also encourages them to appreciate and respect traditions different from their own. Such interactions nurture a sense of pluralism and foster an attitude of acceptance and understanding.

Contribution of Padang State University in Strengthening the Understanding of Religious Moderation of PMM Students

Padang State University (UNP) demonstrates a significant commitment to fostering religious moderation among students participating in the Independent Student Exchange Program (PMM). By embedding the values of moderation into every activity, providing inclusive services for individuals of all religious beliefs, and facilitating diverse religious practices, UNP serves as a model for promoting tolerance and unity in diversity.

UNP goes beyond delivering messages of moderation by actively facilitating students' religious practices. The efforts of UNP to integrate and promote religious moderation have far-reaching effects. By nurturing a sense of unity and understanding, students develop a stronger love for their country and a deeper respect for its diverse cultural and religious fabric (Harimurti, 2023). The initiative aims to eliminate any traces of chauvinism, replacing it with a shared commitment to coexistence. Furthermore, these activities instill in students a passion for voicing the importance of moderation in diversity, reflecting the natural order (*Sunnatullah*) of a harmonious society.

Padang State University's dedication to strengthening religious moderation through its programs and initiatives exemplifies a holistic approach to education. By addressing both academic and social dimensions, UNP equips students with the knowledge, attitude, and experiences needed to become ambassadors of tolerance and unity in a pluralistic society.

Conclusion

Based on the description above, strengthening religious moderation through the Merdeka Student Exchange (PMM) program at Padang State University can be concluded as follows: *First*, strengthening the religious moderation of PMM students at Padang State University by involving Module Lecturers to develop a logical framework for the Nusantara Module as a reference in carrying out 16 module activities consisting of 8 diversity activities, 2 inspiration activities, 5 reflection activities, and 1 social contribution activity. *Second*, in efforts to strengthen PMM students' understanding of religious moderation, the PMM UNP implementation team organized various activities including learning to get along with the limau baronggeh traditional tradition, visiting minority communities in Padang, learning local wisdom with religious and traditional leaders of Kubu Gadang Village. *Third*, the contribution of Padang State University in strengthening the religious moderation of PMM students is in the form of inserting moderation values in each activity, providing maximum service to all religious believers, and facilitating various activities that support the strengthening of religious moderation.

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