Systematic Literature Review: The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Instilling Religious Moderation in Elementary Schools

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Abstract

Religious moderation plays a crucial role in fostering tolerance and harmony in diverse societies. In Indonesia, the need to instill religious moderation in young learners has become increasingly vital, particularly in elementary schools, where foundational values are formed. This study examines the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in promoting religious moderation among elementary school students. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, this research reviews existing literature on the implementation of religious moderation within the PAI curriculum and the strategies employed by teachers to instill these values. The findings suggest that PAI teachers are pivotal in shaping students' attitudes toward religious tolerance, using strategies such as role modeling, promoting respect through group discussions, and creating religious habituation programs. The study concludes that effective Islamic religious education can foster an inclusive, tolerant, and harmonious school environment, contributing to the broader goals of national unity and interfaith respect. This paper highlights the importance of PAI teachers as facilitators of moderation, emphasizing their role in guiding students to appreciate religious diversity and live harmoniously in a multicultural society.

Keywords: *Tolerance; Religious Diversity; Interfaith Cooperation; Religious Moderation; PAI Teachers.*

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Introduction

Religious moderation is the key to fostering tolerance and harmony at local, national, and global levels. Rejecting both extremism and liberalism in religion while choosing moderation ensures balance, preserves civilization, and promotes peace [1]. This approach allows people of all faiths to respect one another, accept differences, and coexist harmoniously [2]. In a multicultural society like Indonesia, religious moderation may be more of a necessity than an option. Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020, enacted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs through Ministerial Regulation No. 14 of 2020, emphasizes the importance of religious moderation education in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at the elementary school level [3]. This education plays a crucial role in promoting values of integrity, solidarity, and tolerance [4]. It is also an essential part of efforts to develop Islamic education that embodies *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to all creation).

Religious education cannot exist independently of the broader national education system. Religion plays a significant role and has an essential purpose within national education [5]. In alignment with the goals of national education, which include developing individuals' potential and shaping a dignified national civilization, religious education aims to nurture students into faithful, pious, and morally upright individuals who are knowledgeable, independent, capable, creative, and responsible citizens [6]. Responsible and well-structured religious education provides knowledge and reshapes students' perspectives on religious doctrines [7]. This is primarily achieved through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) courses across all levels and modalities of education [8]. In general, government regulations on Religious Education and Religious Studies encourage educational institutions (schools and universities) to provide accurate and high-quality religious education [9]. This ensures that students become devoted followers of their faith while avoiding misguided teachings disguised as religion [10].

Religious education not only instills a proper understanding of religious teachings in adherents but also fosters an awareness of how to actualize these teachings in daily life [11]. This results in both personal and communal piety. On an individual level, it cultivates believers who adhere to their religious principles while also promoting peaceful coexistence with people of all faiths and even those without religious beliefs [12].

Islamic religious education can be defined as a systematic and organized effort to help students live their lives in accordance with Islamic principles. In other words, it aims to develop the divine attributes bestowed upon humans by

Allah SWT. This effort is carried out solely for the purpose of worshiping Allah, without expecting any reward beyond that [13].

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a structured and planned form of education designed to guide, educate, and prepare students to believe in, understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings [14]. Subjects covered in PAI include ethics (*akhlaq*), Quran and Hadith studies, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the history of Islamic civilization [15].

The current approach to Islamic religious education tends to be *top-down* or deductive, presenting religious truths without considering real-life contexts. In terms of content, ceremonial aspects remain dominant, while *fiqh* is presented as an alternative discipline [16]. Islamic religious education classes are often perceived as rigid and normative rather than engaging and thought-provoking [17]. In essence, the implementation of Islamic religious education focuses more on teaching rather than actual learning [18]. Another methodological challenge is that Islamic religious education follows a *banking education* model, where knowledge is simply transferred to students without encouraging them to critically engage with or creatively respond to complex real-life situations [19]. Islamic religious education aims to equip students with religious knowledge so that they can develop faith and piety to Allah SWT [20]. By Islamic teachings, this education also instills an inclusive, moderate, and philosophical approach in fostering interfaith cooperation within society to strengthen national unity [21]. Islamic religious education seeks to shape students so that they can practice Islamic teachings by established guidelines while also fostering harmony in religious diversity within the school environment [22]. As a result, students are expected to develop the ability to accept differences and live in a diverse society without harboring negative prejudices against followers of other religions [23].

Currently, religious education that emphasizes discourse-based values has become increasingly important. The paradigm of religious education plays a role in promoting harmony among religious communities [24]. Various theological issues that have emerged have triggered conflicts and violence in interfaith interactions [25]. Several indicators reflect signs of national division. These conflicts have not only resulted in numerous casualties but have also caused the destruction of hundreds of places of worship, including mosques and churches [26].

Elementary school-age children are at a developmental stage that makes them vulnerable to deviant behavior. They tend to continue engaging in activities they find enjoyable, even if those behaviors are inappropriate [27]. For example, "prank" content is often perceived as funny and entertaining when directed at friends, but without realizing it, such actions can be harmful to others [28]. If

excessive or extreme behaviors are left unchecked at the elementary school level, there is a concern that radical ideologies could take root and persist into adulthood[29]. Therefore, it is essential to prevent radicalism from an early age by incorporating it into character [30].

Instilling religious moderation in children from an early age is crucial, especially for those at the elementary school level [31]. One effective approach is to teach them the importance of respecting individual differences [32]. Additionally, they should be made aware that insulting or belittling other religions and ethnic groups is unacceptable [33].

Elementary school is an ideal stage to instill moral values under their religious teachings. At this phase, children begin to distinguish between right and wrong as they grow, based on the religious teachings they receive and learn [34]. Currently, there has been a shift in the perception of the quality of the Muslim community, where they are increasingly labeled as radical and extreme due to the emotional actions of certain individuals [35]. As a result, Muslims are losing their identity of moderation, leading to polarization between those perceived as "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" [36]. However, it remains difficult to determine whether this polarization is driven by political factors or religious practices [37].

Based on the phenomenon above, it is evident that Islamic religious education teachers play a crucial role in encouraging, guiding, directing, and motivating students regarding the importance of interfaith tolerance [38]. The goal of this role is to help students develop a proper understanding of tolerance, avoid anarchic behavior, and foster mutual respect among followers of different religions [39].

Religious education teachers serve as facilitators, educators, and learning companions in the process of religious instruction. They must be able to create a positive, open, and engaging learning environment where students can explore different religious teachings [40]. Additionally, religious education teachers have the responsibility of instilling in students the importance of recognizing universal religious values and emphasizing the crucial need to respect religious diversity [41].

Education at the elementary school level plays a crucial role. Why is that? At this stage, the foundation for children's thinking and learning abilities begins to develop, influencing their future education [42]. In other words, a child's mental, physical, and intellectual growth is significantly shaped between the ages of 0 and 12 [43]. This period is known as the golden age for a child's development, both physically and psychologically[44].

Therefore, during elementary school, children should be given ample opportunities to acquire knowledge in the best and most accurate way possible. Elementary school is one of the most vital components of the national education system. It lasts for six years and serves as the initial formal education level that plays a key role in shaping students' character for the future. At this age, children start to absorb values and knowledge that will be beneficial in the long run. Hence, this stage is an ideal time for teachers to introduce and instill the concept of religious moderation.

Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative study utilizing a literature review method. The literature sources used include materials relevant to the research problem and objectives, such as articles, journals, proceedings, books, and research reports [45]. According to Craswell, a literature review is a written summary of journal articles, books, and other documents that describe both past and present theories and information [46].

This research is a literature review study (library research) focusing on the analysis of religious moderation. This study uses a qualitative approach to examine religious moderation more deeply [47]. Data collection techniques in this study include collecting information from various primary sources, as well as academic works from previous studies related to the research topic [48].

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a literature review method to analyze the roles and strategies employed by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in instilling religious moderation in elementary schools [49]. A qualitative approach is selected because the focus of this research is to describe in-depth the phenomenon of how PAI teachers promote religious moderation among students.

Type of Research

This research is categorized as a descriptive qualitative study aimed at describing and analyzing the role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation values at the elementary school level, based on existing literature.

Data Sources

The data sources for this study include:

1. Articles and Journals: Scholarly articles and journals that discuss religious moderation, Islamic religious education, and the role of PAI teachers in the context of character education in Indonesia [50].

2. Books and Research Reports: Books and research reports that examine Islamic religious education, religious moderation, and teaching tolerance in elementary schools [51].

3. Regulations and Government Policies: Documents that regulate the curriculum of Islamic religious education in Indonesia, such as Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020 and the Ministerial Regulation on religious moderation in education [52].

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection is conducted through a literature review with the following steps:

1. Identification of Literature Sources: Identifying and selecting relevant literature related to the research topic, including both theoretical works and case studies [53].

2. Compilation of a Literature Catalog: Compiling a list of articles, journals, books, and regulations relevant to this study [54].

3. Content Analysis: Analyzing the content of the identified literature to extract key themes related to the role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation at the elementary school level and the strategies they employ in teaching [56].

4. Synthesis of Findings: Synthesizing findings from the collected literature to provide a comprehensive overview of the efforts of PAI teachers in promoting religious moderation [57].

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted qualitatively using a thematic analysis approach. The steps involved are:

1. Data Coding: Identifying and coding themes that emerge from the collected literature.

2. Categorization of Themes: Grouping related themes such as the role of PAI teachers, approaches to religious moderation, teaching tolerance, and policies on Islamic education [58].

3. Interpretation of Data: Interpreting the findings in the context of Islamic education theory and religious moderation, linking them to the broader social, political, and educational policy contexts [59].

4. Drawing Conclusions: Concluding the role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation and its impact on students' character development [60].

Credibility and Validity

To ensure the credibility and validity of this study, the following steps will be taken:

1. Source Triangulation: Utilizing a variety of data sources, such as scholarly articles, books, reports, and regulations, to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data [61].

2. Theoretical Referencing: Applying established and credible theories to support the interpretation of findings and strengthen the argument [62].

3. Thorough Analysis: Conducting careful and systematic analysis of the data to ensure that no information is overlooked or distorted [63].

By using a literature review method and thematic analysis, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the role of PAI teachers in promoting religious moderation in elementary schools. The study will also propose strategies that PAI teachers can implement to instill values of tolerance and religious moderation in their students.

Result and Discussion

The Role of Islamic Religious Education in Strengthening Religious Moderation

Islamic Religious Education is considered a fundamental pillar in instilling the values of religious moderation, particularly for young learners and the younger generation as future leaders [64]. As part of Indonesian society, we hold great hope that through this religious moderation program, a new generation of change agents will emerge—individuals who are committed to fostering peaceful interfaith relations within the framework of Indonesian unity. Several strategic roles that Islamic religious education can play include:

Prioritizing an inclusive and tolerant approach in Islamic religious education so that all individuals feel accepted without experiencing discrimination. According to Religious Education theory, religious education influences the formation of individual attitudes and behaviors [65]. When applied to Islamic religious education, it can be seen as a crucial factor in shaping moderate attitudes and behaviors among Muslims in Indonesia.

Additionally, Islamic religious education plays a role in instilling the values of unity and cohesion in Islam, which can help bridge differences and promote interfaith cooperation. Building harmonious relationships among

religious communities through dialogue and collaboration fosters a conducive environment for both learning and worship. This aligns with the Religious Moderation theory, which serves as a solution to radicalism and intolerance within religious communities [66]. In this context, Islamic religious education acts as a means to teach moderation and tolerance among Muslims in Indonesia.

Furthermore, Islamic religious education should address contemporary issues and encourage the development of essential life skills. Promoting a critical mindset in religious understanding is vital, enabling students and society to analyze Islam objectively without relying solely on dogmatic interpretations. From a sociology of religion perspective, religious communities are expected to contribute actively to society and positively influence social and political dynamics [13].

Efforts of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Instilling Religious Moderation Values in Schools

The Director General of Islamic Education Decree No. 7272 of 2019 has established guidelines for implementing religious moderation in Islamic education. This scope of Islamic education covers all levels, from early childhood education to higher Islamic religious education [67]. Its implementation also extends to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects in schools, from preschool to university levels. Teachers can foster religious moderation through the following approaches:

1. **Setting an Example**: Teachers demonstrate exemplary attitudes toward individuals of different religions, aligning with the theories they teach. As role models, teachers influence students, who tend to imitate their behavior in school. When such positive habits are instilled consistently, they contribute to ethical conduct both in educational settings and in society. These habits can be religious or moral, shaping students' behavior toward others and their relationship with God.

2. **Encouraging Respect in Group Discussions**: During Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons, teachers form study groups where students learn to respect differing opinions while expressing their own. This helps nurture a culture of tolerance and understanding in discussions.

3. **Establishing Religious Habituation Programs,** Teachers implement programs that reinforce religious habits, such as: Performing congregational obligatory prayers, Practicing Dhuha prayer in congregation, Reciting the Qur'an (Tadarus) before lessons, Holding regular religious studies, Organizing charity programs on Fridays, Encouraging honesty through honesty-based classroom initiatives,

Conducting community Iftar (breaking fast) during Ramadan, Delivering short religious sermons (Kultum) after Dzuhur prayer, Implementing various other habit-building programs that enhance students' religious character.

4. **Creating a School Bulletin Board (Mading),** The school bulletin board serves as a medium for absorbing values of moderation and displaying students' writings, artwork, and poetry, which can be read and appreciated by their peers.

5. **Promoting Tolerance Through Awareness,** Teachers emphasize the importance of tolerance and mutual respect by providing real-life examples of interfaith harmony, fostering a peaceful school environment where diversity is embraced.

Conclusion

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, conducting an in-depth analysis of the efforts undertaken by PAI teachers to instill religious moderation values in elementary schools. To achieve this, PAI teachers employ several strategies, such as serving as role models in both learning activities and daily interactions, establishing habituation programs, creating a bulletin board (Mading), and raising awareness about the significance of tolerance.

A well-structured Islamic Religious Education can foster a proper understanding of Islamic teachings and the values they encompass, including tolerance, justice, and compassion for others. Additionally, this education promotes openness and appreciation of religious diversity, enabling individuals to understand and respect differences in faith and beliefs within society.

Author Contributions

Siskha Putri Sayekti: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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