Dynamics of Religious Moderation: Analytical Study of Islamic Religious Education Learning in Junior High Schools

Afriantoni1, Armelis2, Aisyah Khairunnisa3, Taufik Alhidayah4

1 Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah, Palembang, Indonesia; afriantoni_uin@radenfatah.ac.id
2 SD Negeri 40 Palembang, Indonesia; armelislis@gmail.com
3 Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah, Palembang, Indonesia; 2230212029@radenfatah.ac.id
4 Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah, Palembang, Indonesia; dzahrataufik18@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This research aims to analyze religious moderation in the context of Islamic Religious Education learning at Junior High School and the strategies applied in implementing religious moderation. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through observation and semi-structured interviews. The research was carried out at Junior High School, which has heterogeneous students with different religious and ethnic backgrounds. The SWOT analysis results show that strength lies in the independent curriculum and teacher competence in religious moderation. However, weaknesses arise from limited resources and teachers' theoretical understanding. Opportunities lie in awareness of the diversity of Indonesian society and support from external parties such as the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB). The threat comes from resistance to religious moderation and information imbalance. The implementation of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning has great potential. Strengthening teacher training, collaborating with external parties, and utilizing educational technology are strategies that can be taken to overcome challenges. These steps are expected to improve the quality of learning and form moderate character in students.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Afriantoni
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang; afriantoni_uin@radenfatah.ac.id

1 INTRODUCTION
Multicultural Indonesia is a blessing in disguise that not many other nations have. Various ethnicities, cultures and religions are distributed in various regions. Almost every region has cultural characteristics. Even within one ethnic group, sub-ethnic groups may have different language accents, religions and beliefs. Along with the high mobility and migration of society, interethnic and religious interactions are increasingly intense. Not infrequently, inter-ethnic and religious relations give rise to social friction or even violence. This is where the position of educational instruments that teach religious moderation becomes important. Education, including Islamic religious education, is not just an increase in knowledge and understanding of religious, social, and cultural values, but the
implementation of these values in life together, in society, as a nation (Azra, 2007; Faozan, 2020). Education plays an important role in the internalization of religious moderation.

The dynamics of religious moderation are a crucial aspect in the formation of people’s character and identity. Religious moderation is a theory that contains the idea of being moderate, fair and middle in every aspect of life in this world (Muaz & Ruswandi, 2022). Religious moderation reflects an effort to achieve a balance between religious beliefs and the changing times. Learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in the school environment positions the dynamics of religious moderation as a critical aspect that cannot be separated from the role of teachers as learning designers. PAI teachers not only function as transmitters of religious information, but also have a central role in forming spiritual, moral and social values for the next generation. This function explains that the duties of PAI teachers are related to efforts to shape students’ Islamic character, including forming moderate students (Haniyyah & Indana, 2021). This is the aim of implementing religious moderation with teacher support inside and outside learning.

Religious moderation emphasizes balanced understanding, tolerance, and an open attitude towards differences in beliefs. PAI teachers have a responsibility to facilitate a learning environment that supports students’ spiritual and moral development, while fostering inclusive attitudes and respect for diversity. The results of research conducted by the SETARA Institute, teenagers in the passive intolerant category have transformed into active intolerance, as illustrated from 2.4 percent in 2016 to 5 percent in 2023. Likewise in the exposed category, there has been an increase from 0.3 percent to 0.6 percent (Hukmana, 2023). The change from passive intolerance to active and the increasing exposure to intolerance that occurs among students should raise concerns among teachers that the efforts they have made have not been optimal. This is what initiated researchers in an effort to analyze the dynamics of religious moderation in the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in the school environment.

Research on religious moderation in educational institutions continues to be developed. This explains that religious moderation is an object that must continue to be observed and monitored in its development. Several researchers who study religious moderation include Hidayat & Rahman (2022) where in his research he explained that learning Islamic religious education in schools was effective in instilling the values of religious moderation in students in junior high school. Other research was conducted by Putri & Nurmal (2022) The results of his research show that the implementation of religious moderation in schools can be carried out through the Hidden Curriculum, with a cultural acculturation process through internalization and institutionalization of habits. Other research was conducted by Wardati (2023) where the results of the research show that the implementation of learning based on religious moderation involves a deep understanding of various religions, respect for diversity, an inclusive curriculum, interfaith dialogue, the practice of tolerance, collaboration with parents, and training for teachers. In contrast to previous research, this research focuses on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as strategies for implementing religious moderation contained in Islamic Religious Education learning.

This research aims to explain the religious moderation that occurs in Islamic Religious Education learning and the strategies applied in implementing religious moderation. This research was carried out at a junior high school in Palembang, where there is heterogeneity of students with different religions and ethnicities at this school. The reality that occurs makes PAI teachers strive to continue to foster the value of moderation in their students so that small or even large frictions do not occur between students and other students.

2. METHODS

This research is a qualitative descriptive research, which is included in the type of field research. This type of research is in view (Sugiarti et al., 2020) used when the required data is in the field. The location used in this research is SMP Negeri 3 Palembang. The data in this research were obtained from
PAI teachers and students using data collection techniques, in the form of non-participant observation and semi-structured interviews (Sugiyono, 2020). The data that has been obtained is then tested for validity using time and source triangulation. The data was then analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s theory, namely data reduction, data display and data verification.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. SWOT Analysis of Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education

In efforts to analyze religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMPN 3 Palembang, SWOT analysis was used. This analysis aims to understand the strengths and opportunities that exist along with the existing weaknesses and threats. This analysis is useful for knowing what parts teachers must pay attention to in implementing Islamic Religious Education learning related to religious moderation. SWOT analysis is an abbreviation of the internal environment (Strengths and Weaknesses) and the external environment (opportunities and threats) (Endarwita, 2021). SWOT analysis has the potential to be an effective instrument in identifying and exploring opportunities to design new strategies or initiate innovative program initiatives (Suci & Suwarta, 2019).

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The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of religious moderation contained in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang, are presented in the following discussion:

3.1.1 Strengths

The main strength of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang is the existence of a curriculum that can be the basis for religious moderation. In its implementation, SMP Negeri 3 Palembang uses an independent curriculum. The Independent Curriculum gives educators the freedom to develop quality learning that suits the needs and context of students’ learning environment (Kemendikbud, 2023). In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers take progressive steps by positioning religious moderation as the main approach in their methods. As P stated:

“The implementation of the Independent Curriculum provides more space for the development of learning materials by integrating religious moderation. In the learning process, students are accustomed to respecting each other, deliberating, respecting each other, non-violence, and so on. then implemented using various learning models.”

The Merdeka Curriculum, which is planned to be inaugurated in 2024, has received initial support from the Minister of Education. As a proactive step, the Minister of Education gave permission to schools to adopt the Independent Curriculum starting in 2021 (Muhammad Syaifuddin Zuhri & Muhammad Nasir, 2023). This decision marks the government’s commitment to giving schools the freedom to develop learning approaches that are more innovative and in line with local needs.

SMP Negeri 3 Palembang, as one of the pioneers in implementing the independent curriculum initiative, has taken concrete steps to ensure its successful implementation. The institution ordered all teachers in the school to start the Independent Curriculum learning process, by giving instructions to teachers to carefully study and apply the concepts contained in the curriculum. These instructions become a strength for PAI teachers in designing learning that is deemed to be in line with what is needed by students at the institution.

Another strength is the competence of qualified teachers regarding religious moderation both in understanding and implementing it in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang. Teacher competence itself is divided into four, namely professional, social, personality and pedagogical competence (Alfath et al., 2022). These four competencies are the main basis for teachers’ ability to design learning, apply learning and even behave in their daily lives. As SAV put it:
“Religious moderation continues to be socialized by the Ministry of Religion through religious teachers. I attended several seminars related to the implementation of religious moderation. Plus reading the ministry’s religious moderation guidebook. “This effort is part of increasing competence to become a professional teacher.”

3.1.2 Weaknesses

Limited resources are the main obstacle in implementing a religious moderation approach. In particular, limited access to books, teaching materials and facilities that support a broader and deeper understanding of religious moderation. In developing this approach, the need for relevant literature and adequate libraries is crucial. This learning resource helps educators increase educational productivity, make learning more effective and efficient, provide opportunities for students to develop according to their abilities and potential, plan more systematic learning programs, and strengthen learning (Samsinar, 2019). As P stated:

“The provision of resources in the form of books and teaching materials on religious moderation is still very limited at this time. Likewise, training and seminars are limited and if there is training, it is conducted online. “For me, online training has disadvantages, including difficulty networking and understanding material from resource persons.”

Constraints in learning resources can be detrimental to the development of understanding of religious moderation, especially in educational environments. Lack of quality books and teaching materials can hinder the learning process (Herin, 2017). Apart from that, adequate facilities, such as discussion rooms or meeting places, play an important role in creating an environment that supports dialogue and tolerance between religious communities.

Teachers’ ability to understand religious moderation is limited in the theoretical realm of the material they study. Teachers do not yet have an understanding of the reality of religious moderation in a wider scope. This means teachers need training and development in terms of religious moderation. However, unfortunately, inadequate training for teachers in integrating religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning is one of the main challenges in improving the quality of religious education in schools.

Efforts to overcome this have actually been carried out, for example training carried out by the Ministry of Religion by collaborating with the TNI and Polri in terms of encouraging the strengthening of religious moderation (Asrori, 2023). However, this training has not been comprehensively provided for teachers who have the main focus on instilling a moderate spirit in students. Of course, teachers still do not have a platform to receive training in religious moderation.

3.1.3 Opportunities

Until now, the dominant Indonesian society still upholds moderate values by respecting differences, both in terms of culture, religion, race and social background. This is a form of actualization of the Indonesian nation’s motto, namely Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which has a multicultural spirit by respecting every difference that exists. (Rahman et al., 2020). Awareness of this diversity is the main key in creating an inclusive and harmonious environment.

Not only the general public but also students as agents of change in society are currently playing a role in multicultural awareness. Studies regarding religious moderation continue to be carried out by students, quite a few students and their organizations continue to study and advocate for religious moderation both among students themselves and in society. Insertion of religious moderation values into courses, internalization of religious moderation values through the learning process, integration of religious moderation values through various student activities, internalization of religious moderation values through field practice, community service and superior programs are also carried
out by educational institutions high so that religious moderation is already ingrained in students when they hold a bachelor’s degree (Sutarto, 2022).

The opportunities that exist in implementing religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang are also supported by the existence of various external parties who are in line with this goal. Among them are FKUB or Religious Harmony Forum, Religious Organizations, Education Office, Ministry of Religion with the aim of instilling the value of religious moderation in their own way. As H stated:

"In implementing religious moderation, it provides opportunities to collaborate with external parties. "In its implementation, it needs a lot of support to make it easier to internalize the values of religious moderation in students."

With support from external parties, the initiative or project can gain additional strength to achieve its goals. Synergy between religious educational institutions, religious organizations and the government creates an ecosystem that supports and strengthens a shared vision to achieve positive change in society.

3.1.4 Threats

Resistance to the religious moderation approach can arise from various parties who have different views. Some groups may not agree with the concept of moderation in a religious context because they consider it a form of sacrifice to values or principles that are considered essential. The most crucial domain is the realm of attitudes that arise in terms of religious moderation.

Views regarding the limits of respect for other religions are usually viewed differently by one person/group and another person/group. For example, wishing Christians a Merry Christmas in the context of maintaining harmony and having relationships is permissible (Aspandi, 2018). However, other views still do not allow this statement. These situations, when not addressed properly, can become material used by people who do not agree with the concept of moderation.

Information imbalance also threatens to create a learning environment that is vulnerable to the influence of extremism. In this context, a lack of balanced information can harm the learning process by presenting a perspective that is too biased or not objective. This can create distortions in students’ perceptions and understanding of critical issues. The ease of accessing information makes radicalism and terrorism a place in the mass media (Tigor Sitorus, 2022). As P stated:

"As a religion teacher, I am also worried about the imbalance of information which will have a bad impact on students. "We, fellow religious teachers, remind each other to read information carefully from various opinions and do tabayyun."

This threat arises from the unequal distribution of information online and offline. The availability of poorly verified sources of information can open the door to the spread of extreme or biased views. In these situations, students may have difficulty developing a balanced and critical understanding of various issues.

3.2. Strategy for Implementing Religious Moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning

Various strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that arise in the implementation of religious moderation in Islamic Religious Education learning in public junior high schools 3. To achieve the goal of implementing a religious moderation approach in Islamic Religious Education learning in Palembang, a series of strategies are needed that can be implemented by teachers. Here are some steps you can take as P stated:
"The strategy used in implementing religious moderation is by attending various trainings on religious moderation, collaborating with various parties such as ministries, and using learning technology."

As stated by SAV:

"I utilize electronic-based technology to deliver material that is integrated with the value of religious moderation."

3.2.1 Strengthening Teacher Training

Holding regular training for teachers is a very important initiative in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The main aim of the training is to provide teachers with an in-depth understanding of the concept of religious moderation, inclusive learning strategies, and the implementation of diversity values in the educational context. In the training, teachers will have the opportunity to explore the concept of religious moderation in more depth, which involves a balanced and thoughtful understanding of Islamic religious teachings. Through interactive discussions, they will be guided to explore the meaning of the value of religious moderation in everyday contexts and how to apply it in the Islamic Religious Education learning process.

Apart from that, training can also discuss inclusive learning strategies that enable every student, regardless of their background or differences, to experience the presence and benefits of Islamic Religious Education learning. The results obtained in the training are of course inclusive PAI, namely an explanation of Islam that recognizes differences so that the existence of other religions becomes a broad source of knowledge accompanied by the unification of religious and other knowledge so that it contains more meaning (Abdullah et al., 2021).

The training also provides teachers with practical guidance on how to create a friendly and supportive learning environment for all students, so that the value of religious moderation can be reflected in daily interactions in the classroom. The importance of understanding and applying diversity values will also be a main focus in training. Teachers will of course reflect on how to enrich Islamic Religious Education learning by including various religious and cultural perspectives. In this way, teachers can create a learning environment that respects diversity and builds tolerance among students.

3.2.2 Collaboration with External Parties

Close collaboration with religious educational institutions, religious organizations and the government is not just an additional element, but an integral foundation that is very important in carrying out successful implementation. The synergy between these institutions provides a significant positive impact, forming a solid foundation for achieving educational goals that are in line with the vision of religious moderation. In this context, support from external parties plays a key role. Providing additional resources such as books, equipment, and educational infrastructure not only improves the quality of teaching, but also creates an adequate learning environment. Facilities and infrastructure actually have an impact on student motivation in learning (Jannah & Sontani, 2018). More than that, a deep understanding of religious values promoted by religious educational institutions and religious organizations enriches learning perspectives, creates space for character development and a deeper understanding of cultural diversity.

The practical guidance provided to teachers by religious education institutions and religious organizations is a valuable investment in improving teaching skills and contextual understanding. Teachers who are supported by this practical guide can more effectively integrate religious values in the curriculum, create holistic learning, and facilitate positive dialogue between students from diverse backgrounds. No less important, collaboration with the government opens up opportunities for wider
access to various education programs. This collaboration can involve funding allocation, supporting policies, and curriculum integration into the national education system. In this way, a framework is formed that supports the vision of religious moderation, strengthening the position of education as a means of character formation and cementing diversity.

3.2.3 Use of Educational Technology

The use of educational technology has become a major milestone in efforts to modernize the learning process. Technology in education has an important role, such as providing learning facilities through planning, development, utilization, management and evaluation of learning resources. Apart from that, technology also helps solve learning problems with a cross-disciplinary approach, increases work effectiveness and efficiency, provides alternative solutions for the performance of educational organizations, and creates new innovations in education to overcome existing challenges (Nurillahwaty, 2021).

Teachers now have the opportunity to optimize the use of online platforms that not only support interaction and collaboration but also integrate the value of religious moderation effectively. By utilizing this technology, the learning experience becomes more interesting and dynamic (Miasari et al., 2022). Teachers can create inclusive learning environments, allowing students to engage in in-depth discussions about the values of religious moderation. A diversity of cultures and beliefs can be brought together through the features of online platforms, creating space for a deeper understanding of the differences and similarities among students.

Apart from the interactive aspect, the use of educational technology also opens the door to wider access to educational resources. Students are no longer limited by geographic boundaries or local resources, as they can easily access learning materials from various sources around the world. This not only enriches learning content, but also helps engage students in lifelong learning, developing skills relevant for the future. Thus, the integration of educational technology in the learning process not only has a positive impact on the diversity of religious moderation values, but also brings about an era of inclusive and global resource-based learning. This step provides a solid foundation for the modernization of education, creating a generation that is skilled, open, and ready to face the challenges of an ever-evolving world.

4. CONCLUSION

An examination of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at SMP Negeri 3 Palembang reveals considerable room for improvement in course quality if religious moderation serves as the overarching strategy. The independence in curriculum design that comes from using the Independent Curriculum and having teachers who are knowledgeable about religious moderation is where the programme really shines. Nevertheless, the lack of resources, particularly books and other materials that can help people comprehend religious moderation, is a shortcoming. Problems could develop when there is reluctance to use this method or when there is an imbalance of knowledge that hinders learning. The government, religious education institutions, and teachers themselves can work together to improve student learning through the strategic use of technology in the classroom, better teacher preparation programmes, and other measures. Regular professional development for educators allows them to deepen their knowledge and create inclusive pedagogical practices. Resource support and practical guidance are provided by collaboration with third parties. Using technology in the classroom does double duty: it improves students’ learning experiences and makes world-class educational materials more accessible. This study has a caveat in that it doesn’t provide any practical advice on how to incorporate moderate religious principles into Islamic religious education lessons. Consequently, this study recommends that Islamic religious education programs look into how students internalise religious moderation principles.
REFERENCES


