

The Role of Religious Education in Dealing with the Issue of Radicalization among Students

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ABSTRACT

Radicalization has become a serious threat in the world of education, especially among students who are in the developing stage of self-identity search, where curiosity and emotional instability make them vulnerable to the influence of radical ideology. Religious education, in this context, plays a central role in shaping students' character by instilling values of moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This study aims to explore the role of religious education in preventing radicalization, using a descriptive qualitative method with data collection techniques through in-depth observation and interviews involving teachers, students, principals, and parents. The focus of the research is on the implementation of religious moderation values in schools as an effort to build students' critical attitudes towards extremist ideologies. The results of the study show that inclusive, interactive, and collaborative teaching approaches in religious education, both in the classroom and by involving the external community, play an important role in fostering tolerant characters and being able to reject radical narratives. The study highlights the importance of collaboration between schools and families, as well as the need for digital literacy education to strengthen students' resilience to exposure to extremist content on social media. The implications of this study include the need to integrate materials relevant to actual issues in the religious education curriculum, as well as the development of community-based educational programs that involve families and communities as additional bulwarks of protection for students.

INTRODUCTION

Radicalization has become one of the significant threats facing the world of education today, especially among students. In their developmental phase, students are

in the process of searching for identity and identity. This phase is characterized by high curiosity and emotional instability, which makes them more vulnerable to the influence of radical ideologies that offer instant and simple solutions to the various social and existential problems they face (Budiman et al., 2024; Sari, 2024). Radical propaganda often targets young people, exploiting their curiosity and emotional instability to instill extreme ideologies. Educational institutions, especially through religious subjects, have a responsibility to spread moderate understanding and develop a tolerant and critical attitude in religion (Ningsih et al., 2024). At this point, students can easily be influenced by extremist narratives that lead them down the path of violence and intolerance.

Radicalization does not only occur through the social environment but also infiltrates through digital spaces, social media, and even extracurricular activities in schools. Extremist groups take advantage of this loophole to spread radical propaganda to students, by exploiting their dissatisfaction with social, economic, or political issues (Sururiyah & Yunita, 2022). In this context, education has an important role in building a fortress for students to reject radical narratives and form a moderate and tolerant understanding. The threat of radicalization is increasingly complex because it is not only limited to the spread of extreme ideologies, but also concerns the practices of intolerance that can occur in students' daily social interactions. This situation reinforces the importance of the role of education, especially religious education, in providing a deep and balanced understanding of human values, tolerance, and diversity. This ensures that students are able to recognize and reject extremist narratives that they may encounter in their daily lives (Haq et al., 2023).

Religious education is not only a means of understanding religious teachings, but also an important instrument in instilling the values of moderation and harmony. Proper religious teaching can help reduce the potential for intolerance by encouraging the understanding that differences are a wealth to be respected. Thus, religious education is expected to be able to create awareness in students to appreciate diversity and maintain peace in society. This research is very important to ensure that religious education is able to play its role optimally in shaping a young generation with character, criticality, and tolerance.

METHODOLOGY

Research on the role of religious education in dealing with the issue of radicalization among students will use a descriptive qualitative method. This method aims to explore a deep understanding of the implementation of religious education in schools and its impact on the prevention of radicalization. This research will be carried out in several junior high schools that have religious education programs, involving teachers, students, principals, and parents as the main informants. The research subject will be selected by purposive sampling. The data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of teachers and students in implementing the values of religious moderation, participatory observation to see firsthand the learning process of religious education in the classroom and extracurricular activities, as well as

documentation to review the curriculum and teaching materials related to religious education and religious moderation. With observations in the junior high school environment, this research is expected to find patterns in religious teaching and how students interact with concepts such as tolerance and moderation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This research reveals several important findings related to the role of religious education in dealing with the issue of radicalization among junior high school students. The results of the study were compiled based on interviews with teachers, students, principals, and parents, as well as direct observation of the learning process in the classroom and extracurricular activities. These findings show how religious education contributes to building a moderate understanding as well as the challenges faced in its implementation.

Interviews were conducted with informant sources, namely religious education teachers, students, and school principals. The results of interviews with teachers stated that they tried to teach the values of moderation through materials that focused on tolerance and harmony. One of the teachers mentioned that:

“Kami mengajarkan nilai-nilai moderasi lewat materi tentang toleransi dan kerukunan. Misalnya, kami mengajak siswa buat paham pentingnya menghargai perbedaan dan sikap terbuka terhadap pendapat orang lain. Waktu diskusi di kelas, kami sering membahas topik tentang saling pengertian dan cara menyikapi perbedaan dengan baik. Tujuannya biar mereka bisa bergaul di masyarakat yang beragam”

(We teach the values of moderation through materials about tolerance and harmony. For example, we invite students to understand the importance of respecting differences and being open to other people's opinions. During class discussions, we often discuss the topic of mutual understanding and how to respond to differences well. The goal is for them to be able to get along in a diverse society)

The interviews reflect an inclusive and progressive approach to education. In the context of religious education, respecting differences is not just an acknowledgment of diversity, but also an active step in shaping the character of tolerant and empathetic students. Teachers encourage students to share personal experiences, ask questions, and argue constructively. This not only helps students develop critical thinking skills, but also enriches their perspective on broader issues, such as social conflict, discrimination, and interreligious harmony.

In practice, teachers strive to create a safe and comfortable classroom environment, where each student feels free to express their opinions without fear of judgment or discrimination. This is supported by the statement by the teacher:

“Saya selalu memulai dengan menciptakan suasana yang aman dan terbuka. Saya memberi tahu siswa bahwa semua pendapat mereka dihargai dan bahwa kami di sini untuk saling belajar. Ketika kami membahas tema tertentu, saya sering meminta mereka untuk mengaitkan materi dengan pengalaman mereka sendiri. Ini membantu mereka merasa lebih terlibat.”

(I always start by creating a safe and open atmosphere. I tell students that all their opinions are valued and that we are here to learn from each other. When we discuss a particular theme, I often ask them to relate the material to their own experiences. This helps them feel more engaged)

The results of interviews with religious education teachers showed that they tried to teach the values of moderation through materials that focused on tolerance and harmony, by creating a safe and comfortable classroom environment so that students felt free to express their opinions without fear of judgment. Teachers encourage open discussions, where students can share personal experiences and argue constructively, thus helping them develop critical thinking skills and broaden their perspectives on broader social issues.

The interviewed students revealed that religious education in schools plays an important role in helping them understand and internalize the values of harmony. One of the students stated:

“Menurut saya, pendidikan agama di sekolah sangat berperan penting dalam membantu kami memahami dan menginternalisasi nilai-nilai kerukunan. Misalnya, kami sering berdiskusi tentang toleransi beragama dan membaca cerita-cerita tokoh yang menghargai perbedaan. Selain itu, ada juga kegiatan lintas agama yang mengajak kami berinteraksi dengan teman dari latar belakang berbeda, sehingga kami lebih memahami pentingnya hidup harmonis”

(In my opinion, religious education in schools plays a very important role in helping us understand and internalize the values of harmony. For example, we often discuss religious tolerance and read stories of people who value differences. In addition, there are also interfaith activities that invite us to interact with friends from different backgrounds, so that we better understand the importance of living in harmony).

This statement shows that the learning received encourages students to apply these values in daily life. The material taught invites students to reflect on the importance of respecting each other, understanding, and empathizing with the differences that exist around them.

However, some students also complained of a lack of time to discuss actual issues related to radicalization. Although they feel that religious education provides an important

understanding of the values of harmony and tolerance, they feel that the existing curriculum is inadequate enough to answer the challenges they face in the real world. One of the students stated,

"Saya berharap ada lebih banyak waktu untuk mendiskusikan isu-isu seperti radikalisasi dan cara efektif menghadapinya. Kadang-kadang, materi yang kami pelajari terasa terlalu teoritis dan kurang relevan dengan kenyataan yang kami temui di masyarakat. Saat saya menjelajahi internet, tidak jarang saya menemukan ceramah atau konten yang bernuansa radikal. Hal ini membuat saya berpikir bahwa pendidikan agama di sekolah perlu lebih membekali kami dengan pemahaman yang praktis dan kemampuan kritis untuk mengenali serta menghadapi paham-paham semacam itu."

(I wish there was more time to discuss issues such as radicalisation and how to effectively deal with it. Sometimes, the material we learn feels too theoretical and less relevant to the reality we encounter in society. When I surf the internet, it is not uncommon for me to come across lectures or content that has radical nuances. This makes me think that religious education in schools needs to better equip us with practical understanding and critical skills to recognize and confront such understandings)

These complaints show that there is a gap between the education received in school and the reality faced by students outside the classroom. In today's digital era, students are often exposed to various content related to extremism and radicalization, both through social media and the news. Therefore, they feel it is important to be able to discuss these issues openly in class, so that they not only understand the theory, but can also develop the skills to think critically and analyze the information they encounter.

Thus, there is a clear need to adapt the religious education curriculum to be more responsive to actual issues, including radicalization. The additional time for discussion and development of more relevant teaching materials can help students not only understand religious teachings, but also be prepared to face the complex and diverse social challenges of the modern world.

The principal emphasized the importance of close collaboration between schools and parents in warding off radicalism among students. According to him, schools have a role to provide an understanding of the values of moderation and tolerance through the curriculum and school activities. However, the role of parents at home is very crucial in supervising and accompanying children in daily activities, including the use of digital media which can be a source of exposure to radical ideas. He said,

"Kami berharap, dengan kolaborasi yang kuat, baik melalui sosialisasi rutin, pertemuan, maupun komunikasi yang aktif, orang tua dan sekolah bisa bersama-sama mendeteksi tanda-tanda awal radikalisme. Kami juga mengadakan program penyuluhan untuk orang tua, agar mereka dapat mengenali ciri-ciri perubahan

perilaku pada anak yang mungkin menunjukkan adanya pengaruh radikalisme," ujar kepala sekolah"

(We hope that with strong collaboration, both through regular socialization, meetings, and active communication, parents and schools can jointly detect the early signs of radicalism. We also hold counseling programs for parents, so that they can recognize the characteristics of behavior changes in children that may indicate the influence of radicalism," said the principal)

This statement shows awareness of the central role of parents in supporting religious education and character development of students. The principal understands that learning in school will not be effective enough without strong support from the family. This collaboration is important, especially in the context of religious education which aims to build a tolerant and moderate attitude among students. By involving parents, schools can create synergies between formal and informal education. Parents are expected not only to support the learning process, but also to be a good example for their children in applying the values of harmony and respect for differences in daily life.

Observation

Observations during class hours in religious education classes display very deep learning dynamics and are rich in interaction. Teachers consistently encourage students to engage through an open discussion method, where topics regarding the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and various social challenges are presented in a way that is relevant to their daily lives. Each student seems to be encouraged to think critically and dare to express their opinions, creating a positive and inclusive learning atmosphere.

Teachers play the role of facilitators, who not only direct the discussion but also keep any differences of opinion acceptable with an open attitude. When there are differences of view, teachers provide examples and guidance to students on how to appreciate different points of view, while maintaining a harmonious classroom atmosphere. This reinforces their understanding that diversity is not something that separates, but rather enriches discussions and deepens collective understanding.

In addition to discussions, teachers often connect the subject matter to actual events or issues, which makes it easier for students to see the relevance of learning to their lives outside of the classroom. This allows them to understand that religious tolerance and values have real applications in the face of a diverse world. The overall observation shows that this approach not only builds students' theoretical understanding but also instills essential social skills, such as empathy, appreciation for diversity, and the ability to dialogue well.

DISCUSSION

Islamic Religious Education in Character Formation

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in shaping students' character, especially in the context of religious moderation and strengthening social values such as tolerance, respect, and balance. Character cultivation through PAI is carried out by internalizing the values of moderation, such as *tawasuth* (middle), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *tawazun* (balanced), and *i'tidal* (fair and consistent). (Rahmatika, 2022). By teaching these principles, students are taught to respect differences, think critically, and be open to diversity, which is not only relevant in daily interactions but also as a bulwark against the influences of radicalism and extremism (Anwar & Siti, 2021).

Effective PAI learning approaches to building social character include group discussion methods, case studies, and simulations, which help students understand the relevance of Islamic values in real life. For example, group work activities allow students to work together without discrimination, reinforcing mutual respect and tolerance. In addition, the involvement of educators as role models in implementing the values of religious moderation is also essential. Educators are expected to show a fair, consistent, and tolerant attitude, which students will later follow in their interactions with others (Harismawan et al., 2022; Mustafa, 2023).

Several previous studies have shown that teachers play a role as facilitators who not only convey religious teachings, but also develop students' critical thinking skills in facing various views. Comprehensive religious education also emphasizes the importance of compassion and social awareness, which is a bulwark for students not to be easily influenced by extreme ideologies that undermine unity (Ainiyah, 2013; Cahyono, 2018; Nuraisyah & Acep, 2022; Khadafie, 2023; Primarni, 2024). Not only that, the implementation of an inclusive curriculum by teaching history, ethics, and wisdom in Islamic teachings helps students understand that religion has a big role in social peace and harmony. Religious education not only forms a positive mindset, but also increases empathy and solidarity among students (Rifa'I, 2020; Somad, 2021; Nurazizah et al., 2022; Herzawati, 2022).

Religious education in shaping the character of anti-radicalism becomes very effective when using a moderation approach that prioritizes the values of tolerance, openness, and dialogue between religious communities. With this approach, students are invited to understand religion as a guideline for life that encourages peace and humanity, so that they are more critical and selective about various information that contains elements of violence or extreme thoughts. The moderation approach in religious education serves as a filter to counter radical influences, which often spread through digital media. With learning that integrates the values of tolerance, students have a solid ethical and moral foundation to reject radical ideologies. They are not only taught religious doctrines but are also faced with various perspectives and are invited to appreciate diversity. Through dialogue and discussion about human values in religion, students learn that peace and justice are the main goals of religious practice.

Teaching Islamic Religious Education in the Challenge of Radicalism

1. Low Integration of Moderation and Tolerance Values

Islamic religious education must be able to instill the values of moderation, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This is important considering that education that does not provide an inclusive perspective can risk reinforcing extreme and exclusive views among students (Ulum, 2023; Hasibuan, 2024; Primarni, 2024). Thus, Islamic religious education needs to prioritize a moderate approach and open up space for students to dialogue and understand the complexity of the diversity that exists around them, so as to create a generation that is able to coexist harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

2. Limitations of Effective Teaching Methods

Passive teaching methods, such as one-way lectures or rote lectures, have proven to be less effective in building a deep understanding of peaceful and tolerant Islamic values. To achieve better results, an interactive teaching approach is needed, in which students are not only passive listeners but also actively involved in the learning process. This approach can include open discussions that allow students to express their opinions, case studies that encourage them to explore different perspectives, and simulations that allow them to experience moderate values firsthand in real-life situations. With these methods, students not only understand basic concepts but also internalize these values, so that they are able to think critically about sensitive issues such as radicalism (Ulum, 2023). This interactive approach also provides space for students to learn to respond to differences of opinion constructively, improving their social and emotional skills, which are crucial in shaping a moderate and inclusive character in today's era of diversity.

3. The Role of Family and Community in Supporting Anti-Radicalism Education

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) can not only have an optimal impact in the school environment, but also requires close collaboration with parents and the community to strengthen and expand the application of tolerance values outside the school environment. By engaging families and communities, PAI can ensure that positive messages of moderation, peace, and respect for difference are consistently understood and applied by students inside and outside the school. Collaborative programs designed to engage families, such as family discussions on tolerance or joint community activities that focus on cooperation between individuals from different backgrounds, have proven effective in forming an inclusive and respectful mindset among students. In addition, community involvement in PAI education, for example through interfaith workshops, visits to various places of worship, or social service activities that bring students together with other members of the community, helps create a wide and strong support network in an effort to prevent radicalization (Hasibuan, 2024). This collaboration not only strengthens the moral foundation of students but also helps them see firsthand the tolerant and peaceful Islamic values in society, so that they grow into individuals who are able to interact positively and appreciate diversity in their daily lives.

4. The Influence of Social Media and Digital Information

The ease of access to digital information poses a major challenge, as students can be exposed to extremist content. PAI must prepare students with digital literacy skills to filter the information they receive from the internet, building resilience to radical narratives (Ulum, 2023). Therefore, PAI needs to provide students with digital literacy skills, which include the ability to verify the truth of information, recognize biases or tendencies in the content they consume, and distinguish between moderate and extremist views. This digital literacy aims to build students' mental resilience to various forms of propaganda and encourage them to have a critical attitude in dealing with the information they receive. Thus, students not only understand the teachings of peaceful and tolerant Islam but also have the necessary skills to avoid the influence of radical content in the digital world.

CONCLUSION

Islamic Religious Education has a strategic role in preventing radicalization among students through the formation of a moderate character that values diversity and tolerance. Research shows that PAI teachers seek to instill these values with interactive teaching methods, such as open discussions and group work, that train students to think critically about social and religious issues. However, there are limitations in the curriculum and time provided to discuss actual issues such as radicalization, so curriculum adjustments are needed to be more responsive to modern challenges. Support from families and communities is also important, especially in monitoring the digital activities of students who are vulnerable to extremist content. Synergy between schools, families, and communities in instilling moderation values can help create an environment conducive to the formation of student characters that are anti-radicalism, tolerant, and have integrity.

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