

The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Instilling Religious Moderation Values in Generation Z

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the strategies, teaching methods, and approaches used by IRE teachers to nurture balanced, tolerant, and inclusive religious attitudes. Generation Z is growing up in a digital era that is full of information, including diverse religious content. The biggest challenge is filtering out extreme and intolerant information. This is where the strategic role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is needed as agents of religious moderation. This article discusses the role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation values such as tolerance, non-violence, and love for the country. This research uses a qualitative approach with literature studies and field observations in several junior high schools in Indonesia. The results show that teachers who are able to integrate moderation values in teaching materials and personal exemplars contribute significantly in shaping balanced religious understanding in students. This article offers concrete recommendations for strengthening the role of teachers in moderate religious character education.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this rapidly globalizing and digitalizing era, Generation Z individuals born between 1997 and 2012 live in an environment highly connected to technology and digital media. This generation possesses distinct characteristics such as instant access to information, multitasking abilities, and openness to diversity (Utami, 2021). However, behind this sophistication, Generation Z is also the group most vulnerable to exposure to extreme, intolerant, and even radical religious content that circulates widely on the internet without ideological filters. In the context of Indonesia as a plural and diverse nation, the existence of Generation Z must be guided to internalize moderate and tolerant religious values that align with the spirit of nationalism. This is where Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has a very strategic role as a forum for spiritual development while strengthening balanced socio-religious values (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019). Unfortunately, in practice in schools, PAI learning is often still cognitive and dogmatic, and has not fully adapted to an approach that suits the characteristics of Generation Z (Zarkasyi, 2022).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has emphasized the importance of religious moderation through four main pillars: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and acceptance of local culture. Religious moderation is expected not only to be a discourse but also to be internalized through educational institutions, especially by teachers as the main actors in the learning process (Kemenag RI, 2019). However, previous studies have mostly discussed curriculum approaches or policies in general and have not specifically examined the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers directly in internalizing moderation values to students, especially Generation Z who have active, visual, and interactive learning styles (Ramli, 2020). This is the research gap of this study. Thus, this research is important to conduct in order to answer the strategic needs of the times, namely to examine and describe the concrete role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation values in Generation Z. This research is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of adaptive and contextual Islamic religious education strategies in the digital era.

Discussions on religious moderation have become an important topic in the development of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Indonesia, especially as a response to the increasing symptoms of intolerance and radicalism among the younger generation. Several studies have highlighted the importance of integrating moderate values—such as tolerance, non-violence, openness to differences, and patriotism—into the PAI curriculum and learning (Abdullah, 2022; Zuhdi, 2023). Innovative approaches, such as contextual learning and character-based education, have also been widely studied to encourage the creation of an inclusive and diversity-friendly understanding of religion (Fadhilah, 2020). On the other hand, the role of educational institutions as agents in shaping moderate attitudes continues to be strengthened through government policies, such as the Character Education Reinforcement (PPK) program and Religious Moderation program launched by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, most existing studies still emphasize theoretical aspects, curriculum, or macro policies, and have not specifically examined the dynamics of PAI teacher practices in instilling moderate values in the classroom, especially in facing the challenges of the characteristics of Generation Z.

While the discourse on religious moderation in education has been extensively studied, most existing research still focuses on the level of education policy, curriculum development, or the integration of moderation values into the learning system in general. These studies tend not to deeply explore how the implementation of moderation values is carried out by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers directly in the classroom. Moreover, there is a lack of research that specifically highlights the role of PAI teachers in fostering moderate attitudes among Generation Z—an age group that grew up in a digital environment, has broad access to information, and is often exposed to extreme religious narratives through social media. In fact, the critical and independent characteristics

of Generation Z in seeking information demand a different approach from teachers. Therefore, there is a significant research gap in empirically understanding how PAI teachers adapt their learning strategies to instill religious moderation values in students in this digital era. The novelty of this article lies in its focus on the direct role and concrete strategies carried out by PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation values in Generation Z.

This research not only highlights aspects of teaching material, but also examines the dimension of teacher role modeling, adaptive pedagogical approaches, and the use of digital media as a learning tool relevant to the learning styles of the current generation. Thus, this article not only broadens the theoretical perspective on religious moderation, but also makes a practical contribution in the form of a model or pattern of approach that can be applied by teachers in a real learning context. Another novelty lies in the integration of the social context of the digital generation with the challenges of contemporary Islamic education, so that the findings can serve as a reference for the development of educational policies, teacher training, and PAI curriculum innovations that are more responsive to the dynamics of the times.

This research is motivated by the increasing phenomena of intolerance and radicalism among adolescents, especially Generation Z who live in the digital era. Broad access to religious information through social media and digital platforms is often not accompanied by critical literacy skills, thus opening opportunities for the spread of extremist ideologies. In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have a strategic role as agents for instilling the values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, non-violence, and patriotism. Unfortunately, not all teachers have adequate understanding and skills to integrate these values into the learning process. A lack of specialized training, limitations in the use of digital media, and the absence of a systematic and contextual approach make this role less than optimal. Therefore, this study aims to describe the role of PAI teachers in instilling religious moderation values in Generation Z, identify the learning strategies used, analyze the challenges faced, and provide practical recommendations for strengthening teacher capacity in shaping a moderate religious character in the digital era.

2. METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach to detail the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in instilling the values of religious moderation in Generation Z. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to deeply explore information about phenomena occurring in the field, particularly how PAI teachers integrate the values of religious moderation into their teaching. Data collection techniques used in this research include literature review, limited observation, and informal interviews. The literature review was conducted to examine theories related to religious moderation, the role of PAI teachers, and the challenges faced

in religious education in the digital age. Limited observations were carried out in three public junior high schools in Central Lampung to directly observe teachers' practices in implementing the values of religious moderation in the classroom.

In addition, informal interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers aimed to explore their personal views regarding the challenges and strategies used in instilling the values of religious moderation in students. The collected data was then analyzed using the analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, irrelevant data is filtered to ensure that only important data is retained. Furthermore, the relevant data is presented in narrative and table form to facilitate understanding. In the final stage, conclusions are drawn based on the patterns found in the collected data. This technique allows researchers to obtain a clearer picture of how PAI teachers instill religious moderation values and the challenges faced in the process. The data analysis steps to be carried out, in accordance with the Miles and Huberman approach, include data condensation, data display, and verification (Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, 2018)."

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a very important role in instilling values of religious moderation in Generation Z students. The three main methods found in this study are curriculum integration, personal example of the teacher, and the use of digital media. First, PAI teachers integrate the values of religious moderation into their curriculum by incorporating themes such as interfaith tolerance, the importance of interfaith dialogue, and the attitude of respecting differences in beliefs. This is done by linking Islamic teachings about peace, brotherhood, and respect for others, both fellow Muslims and non-Muslims. Second, the personal example of the teacher was also found to be a highly influential factor. Teachers who demonstrate a tolerant attitude, openness to differences, and the ability to control themselves when facing differing opinions in class tend to be more effective in teaching moderation values to students. Students tend to imitate their teachers' behavior, so exemplary examples are very important in the learning process. Third, PAI teachers also utilize digital media as a tool to convey religious messages that promote harmony and religious moderation. Through digital platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, teachers can deliver relevant material in an engaging way for Generation Z, who are very accustomed to technology. Although there have been many positive efforts made, this research also found several challenges, such as the lack of religious moderation training for teachers, some students' resistance to pluralistic views, and digital content biased towards certain ideologies. These challenges require more attention so that teachers' efforts in instilling the values of religious moderation can be more effective.

3.1 Integration Curriculum Islamic Education

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a very important role in integrating the values of religious moderation into the curriculum. One effective way to do this is by incorporating themes of moderation such as interfaith tolerance, interreligious dialogue, and an inclusive attitude into every teaching material. This process allows students to not only understand their own religion deeply but also learn to appreciate and respect the beliefs of others. Teaching these values in the curriculum is very important, considering Indonesia's rich diversity filled with differences in religion, culture, and customs. One example of curriculum integration is by adding the topic of interfaith dialogue in PAI subjects. Islamic Education teachers can facilitate discussions that address the importance of harmonious relationships between religious communities, as well as ways to resolve differences in beliefs peacefully. Thus, students not only learn about Islamic values but also understand that other religions have positive values that need to be appreciated and respected. In this context, curriculum integration also leads to the formation of an inclusive attitude, where students are taught not only to accept differences but also to celebrate them as part of the nation's diversity.

Research by Fadhilah (2020) shows that the integration of religious moderation values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum can have a positive impact on reducing religious conflicts among adolescents. Fadhilah emphasizes that education that emphasizes respect for differences can strengthen mutual respect among students from different religious and cultural backgrounds. In this case, PAI teachers as material deliverers play a significant role in building narratives that support pluralism and interfaith harmony, as well as avoiding narratives that trigger polarization or intolerance. The importance of integrating religious moderation values is also emphasized by Abdullah (2022), who states that the PAI curriculum based on moderation values can prevent the emergence of radical ideologies among teenagers. By providing a broad understanding of interfaith harmony and teaching students to be more open to differences, this curriculum serves as a deterrent against the influence of extremist ideologies that are often spread through social media.

Furthermore, by teaching students to appreciate differences, PAI teachers help them become a more resilient generation in facing the provocations of extreme ideologies that often emerge in the digital world. A generation with a strong foundation in religious moderation is not easily influenced by misleading invitations or doctrines. Through these steps, the integration of a moderate Islamic education curriculum not only serves as an instrument for shaping positive religious character but also as a preventive measure against radicalization and religion-based violence. This approach is expected to produce a younger generation that is more tolerant, inclusive, and broad-minded in facing social challenges in an increasingly complex world.

Personal example is one of the important aspects of education, especially in Islamic religious education. In addition to providing learning materials, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers

are expected to set an example in practicing the values of religious moderation. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are not only expected to teach tolerance, harmony, and openness to differences in their lessons, but also to demonstrate attitudes that reflect these principles in their daily lives. Students, especially Generation Z who are highly connected to the digital world, tend to imitate the behavior and attitudes of adults they consider role models, including their teachers. Therefore, a PAI teacher who can demonstrate an open attitude towards differences in beliefs, avoid intolerance, and show mutual respect will have a significant influence on the students' attitudes. For example, when a teacher shows respect for other religious beliefs, upholds the principle of justice, and avoids behaviors that lead to extremism, students will learn to emulate these attitudes in their social interactions.

Research conducted by Sukardi (2021) found that the personal example set by teachers greatly contributes to fostering moderate attitudes among students. Teachers who consistently demonstrate attitudes reflecting the values of moderation, both in interactions inside and outside the classroom, play a significant role in shaping students' character, making them not only academically intelligent but also tolerant and inclusive towards others. This shows that Islamic religious education is not only limited to formal teaching but also to informal interactions that occur in daily life. The moderate attitudes and behaviors of teachers can serve as a source of inspiration for students, which can strengthen the internalization of peaceful and balanced religious values. Furthermore, the role of teachers as role models also plays a part in reinforcing the messages taught in the curriculum. When a teacher teaches the importance of respecting differences, but in daily life, they do not show an inclusive and moderate attitude, the message will lose its meaning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to be consistent role models in practicing the values of moderation.

3.2. The Use of Digital Media in Islamic Religious Education

In this digital era, the use of social media by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers has become increasingly important in teaching the values of religious moderation, especially to Generation Z, who are very familiar with technology and digital media platforms. Generation Z has a strong attachment to social media platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, making these media channels very effective for conveying messages that are relevant to them. Through these platforms, PAI teachers can use various content formats such as videos, infographics, or creative image posts to instill moderate religious values. These platforms provide space for teachers to create more engaging content that aligns with the lifestyle of Generation Z. For example, short videos on TikTok that demonstrate moderation practices in daily life or infographics on Instagram that explain the importance of interfaith tolerance. This allows teachers to be more interactive in delivering messages, providing explanations that are more visual and easier to understand, and addressing

various issues that are developing among teenagers in a way that is more relevant and closer to their experiences.

Abdullah (2022) in his research mentions that the wise use of social media can be an effective means of strengthening the teaching of moderate Islamic values. Social media allows teachers to access a wider audience and spread messages of tolerance and peace to various segments of society. By using this platform, teachers can introduce religious content that supports the principles of interfaith harmony and avoid the spread of content that contains radicalization or extremist ideologies. Additionally, social media can be used to engage in dialogue and provide explanations that address students' views who may be exposed to more radical ideologies. However, although social media offers many opportunities, teachers must also be careful in selecting and filtering content. Religious content circulating on social media can be very diverse, and not all of it reflects the moderate and tolerant principles of Islam. Therefore, PAI teachers need to have skills in utilizing digital media to guide students to trustworthy sources and provide a balanced understanding of Islam.

In addition, the use of digital media can also serve as a tool to strengthen communication between teachers and students. By utilizing interactive features such as live streaming or comment sections on social media, teachers can directly interact with students, provide feedback, and answer their questions about the lesson material that they do not clearly understand. This creates a more inclusive learning environment and makes it easier for students to access the information they need quickly. Overall, the use of digital media by PAI teachers in Islamic education offers great potential to convey the values of religious moderation to Generation Z. With the right approach, social media can become a very effective tool in creating a younger generation that is more tolerant and open to differences.

Although the role of PAI teachers is very important in instilling the values of religious moderation in Generation Z, there are several challenges that must be faced. One of them is the lack of religious moderation training for teachers. Many PAI teachers have not received sufficient training on how to effectively teach moderation, especially in dealing with differing viewpoints among students. Zuhdi (2023) states that many PAI teachers are not equipped with the skills to address issues of radicalization and intolerance in religious education. Therefore, it is important to develop professional training that focuses more on religious moderation, in order to equip teachers with the right skills to face these challenges. Moreover, the resistance of some students to pluralistic views also poses an obstacle. Some students who grow up in environments that tend to be exclusive and less open to religious differences find it difficult to accept a more inclusive and pluralistic view of other religions.

Fadhilah (2020) revealed that learning that touches on the affective and emotional aspects of students, such as involving them in interfaith social activities, can reduce resistance to pluralistic

views. Lastly, the challenge related to digital content biased towards certain ideologies is becoming increasingly relevant in this digital era. Social media is often filled with biased information and can trigger radicalization. Sukardi (2021) emphasizes that social media can be a source of spreading extremist ideologies, which, if not managed properly, can influence students' thoughts and attitudes. Therefore, PAI teachers need to guide students to be able to sift through the information they receive and prevent them from being exposed to harmful content. With proper training and a wise approach, these challenges can be faced and minimized.

4. CONCLUSION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a very important role in instilling the values of religious moderation in Generation Z, who are growing up in a digital era filled with fast and sometimes extreme information. The role of PAI teachers is not limited to delivering religious material, but also includes the integration of moderation values into the curriculum, personal exemplification, and the utilization of digital media. In the curricular approach, PAI teachers utilize the curriculum to incorporate materials on tolerance, appreciating differences, and the importance of maintaining peace among religious communities. In addition, teachers must also serve as role models in their daily lives, as their attitudes and behaviors will greatly influence students' perspectives on diversity. The exemplary behavior of teachers in demonstrating moderate and tolerant attitudes, both in religious and social contexts, will shape students who are open-minded and capable of appreciating differences.

Furthermore, the use of digital media favored by Generation Z becomes highly relevant for conveying messages of religious moderation in a more engaging and effective manner. Teachers can utilize social media platforms and educational video applications to deliver content that is not only academic but also encourages students to engage in dialogue and think critically about religious diversity. To optimize the role of teachers, specialized training is needed to enhance their competence in instilling the values of religious moderation, including managing classroom dynamics and resolving conflicts based on differences. In addition, supportive educational policies are also very much needed, such as the development of a curriculum that emphasizes character education, as well as the provision of adequate facilities and resources for teachers. With proper training and policies, PAI teachers will be better prepared to guide students in understanding and practicing religious moderation in their daily lives.

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