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Research Article

Strengthening Madrasah Teachers' Competence in Enhancing Religious Moderation Understanding in West Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract. Understanding religious moderation is an important basis for instilling a sense of tolerance among Indonesian society, especially students. In this context, strengthening the understanding of religious moderation for madrasa teachers in NTB (West Nusa Tenggara) can be valuable additional knowledge in facing the contemporary era. The research used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach and through an interview process involving the Director of teachers and

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education staff, the Head of the MI/MTS GTK Development Sub-Team, madrasah principals and madrasah teachers in NTB. This research was carried out directly in the implementation of activities in NTB, precisely one of the programs organized by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion. The main aim of this research is to strengthen the understanding and motivation of madrasa teachers in implementing religious moderation in the school environment. The findings in this research show that there are many cases that occur among NTB students which become the main problem in religious moderation, especially in terms of maintaining the values of tolerance. The understanding obtained from this research becomes additional motivation for madrasa teachers in implementing religious moderation in the school environment. By increasing the understanding and strengthening the competency of madrasa teachers in religious moderation, it is hoped that they will be able to teach better values of tolerance to their students. This will have a positive impact in building a society that is more harmonious, respectful of each other, and has an inclusive attitude towards differences in religion and belief.

Keywoards: Madrasah Teachers, Teachers In Islamic Schools, Islamic Educators.

Abstrak. Pemahaman moderasi beragama menjadi dasar yang penting dalam menanamkan rasa toleransi di kalangan masyarakat Indonesia terutama pasa peserta didik. Dalam konteks ini, penguatan pemahaman moderasi beragama bagi guru madrasah di NTB (Nusa Tenggara Barat) dapat menjadi pengetahuan tambahan yang berharga dalam menghadapi era kontemporer. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan fenomenologi dan melaui proses wawancara melibatkan Direktur guru dan tenaga kependidikan, Kasubtim Bina GTK MI/MTS, kepala madrasah dan guru madrasah di NTB. Penelitian ini dilakukan secara langsung dalam penyelenggaraan kegiata di NTB tepatnya merupakan salah satu program yang diselenggarakan oleh Kementerian Agama RI. Tujuan utama dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memperkuat pemahaman dan motivasi guru madrasah dalam menerapkan moderasi beragama di lingkungan sekolah. Temuan dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat banyak kasus yang terjadi di kalangan siswa NTB yang menjadi pokok permasalahan dalam moderasi beragama, khususnya dalam hal mempertahankan nilai-nilai toleransi. Pemahaman yang diperoleh dari penelitian ini menjadi motivasi tambahan bagi guru madrasah dalam menerapkan moderasi beragama di lingkungan sekolah. Dengan meningkatkan pemahaman dan penguatan kompetensi guru madrasah dalam moderasi beragama, diharapkan mereka akan mampu mengajarkan nilai-nilai toleransi yang lebih baik kepada siswa-siswa mereka. Hal ini akan berdampak positif dalam membangun masyarakat yang lebih harmonis, saling menghormati, dan memiliki sikap inklusif terhadap perbedaan agama dan keyakinan.

Kata Kunci: Guru Madrasah, Moderasi Beragama, Toleransi.

INTRODUCTION

A madrasah teacher is an educator who teaches in a madrasah or Islamic school. They possess in-depth knowledge and understanding of the teachings of Islam and are responsible for teaching religious subjects to students. Madrasah teachers also play a role in guiding students to understand and apply Islamic values in their daily lives (Amrullah, 2022). They have an important responsibility in shaping students' character and morals, as well as developing their understanding of religion. Madrasah teachers play a crucial role in religious and moral education of students (Wahyuningsih, 2021). They are responsible for teaching and guiding students to understand the teachings of religion and develop attitudes that are in line with

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Islamic values (Abror Mhd. et al., 2020). However, in this contemporary era, the challenges of strengthening the understanding of religious moderation and promoting tolerance have become more complex.

Debates between followers of different religions and intercultural issues greatly influence problems within the school environment. Examples of moderation issues that may arise in the school environment include gender and sexual orientation discrimination, where students with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations may face discrimination or harassment in schools. This can create an unsafe and non-inclusive environment for these students to engage in learning at school (Pratiwi, 2022). Prejudice and stereotypes can affect relationships among students in schools. Negative attitudes towards certain groups based on inaccurate assumptions or generalizations can hinder the learning process and create injustice.

To address the challenges of promoting religious moderation in the school environment, it is important to create an inclusive climate, educate students about diversity, and encourage open dialogue (Kholqi, 2023). Training programs on tolerance, cooperation, and intercultural understanding can help address these issues. Additionally, it is important to promote school policies and procedures that protect students from discrimination and harassment, and impose strict sanctions for violations. This is where the role of madrasah teachers becomes crucial in enhancing students' understanding of religious moderation in today's society. One program created and evaluated by the government is the Madrasah Teacher Competency Strengthening Program, which aims to enhance religious moderation teaching skills in the school environment.

Strengthening the competencies of madrasah teachers in the context of religious moderation is important to address these issues. Madrasah teachers need to have in-depth knowledge of religious moderation and the skills to effectively teach it to students (Holan and Connie, 2021). In this context, this research aims to strengthen the competencies of madrasah teachers in understanding religious moderation and enhance their ability to teach tolerance values to students in the Nusa Tenggara Barat region.

This research is expected to provide new insights into the challenges and opportunities in developing understanding of religious moderation among madrasah teachers in NTB. The findings of this research are expected to be used as a basis for designing appropriate training and development programs for madrasah teachers to strengthen their understanding and skills in teaching religious moderation and promoting tolerance among students.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research conducted by the author uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological approach (Rusman, 2021). The data sources used in this research include primary and secondary data (Khoiro, Adhi Kusumastuti, 2019). Primary data is obtained through interviews conducted with the Directorate General of Teachers and Educators (GTK) director, the head of the MI/MTS sub-directorate of GTK, school principals, and madrasah teachers. Secondary data is obtained from articles, papers, and news reports. The data collection techniques used in this research are

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interviews, observations, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2005). The interviews used in this research are unstructured interviews, which are conducted without using a systematically structured interview guide (Moh. Miftachul Coiri, 2019). These interviews usually only outline the main issues to be asked. In observations, researchers need to remember what has been observed previously, so there are several steps to anticipate this, such as taking notes, using electronic tools, classifying relevant phenomena, and adding perceptions about the observed object (Hardani, 2020). These three techniques are used to collect relevant data regarding the research problem. In this research, data analysis is conducted following the interactive model by Miles and Huberman. The model consists of three stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles, Hubberman, and Sidaha, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious moderation refers to a balanced and moderate approach or attitude in understanding, practicing, and interacting with religion (Nisar Mahyuddin, 2022). It involves respecting the freedom of religion and beliefs of others and avoiding religious extremism or fundamentalism. Religious moderation encompasses several aspects, including, Tolerance It involves having an open attitude and respecting the diversity of religions and beliefs. Religious moderation encourages appreciation for differences and avoids discrimination or religious-based intolerance (Fahri, Mohammad, 2022).

Interreligious dialogue: It refers to the ability to communicate, interact, and collaborate with individuals from various religious backgrounds. Interreligious dialogue aims to build better understanding and cooperation among followers of different religions (Abror Mhd. et al., 2020). Balanced understanding: Religious moderation promotes a balanced understanding of religion, avoiding extreme or radical interpretations. It emphasizes the universal peaceful values of religions, such as compassion, justice, and peace (Dewi and Kristina, 2021). Harmonious living: Religious moderation involves integrating religious values into everyday life in a balanced and harmonious way. This includes maintaining a balance between religion and social, economic, and political aspects of life (Riska Dwi Lestari, 2023).

Avoiding extremism: Religious moderation emphasizes the importance of avoiding religious extremism in both religious and everyday life. It rejects violence, intolerance, and fanaticism in the name of religion (Nisar Mahyuddin, 2022). Religious moderation is an important approach in maintaining peace, harmony, and coexistence of religions in a diverse society. It promotes appreciation for differences, constructive dialogue, and a balanced understanding of religion, enabling cooperation and mutual respect among followers of different religions.

Therefore, strengthening these competencies becomes a program conducted by the Directorate General of Teachers and Educators (GTK) of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Jakarta, Indonesia. As part of efforts to improve the quality of education in madrasahs in NTB, the Directorate of GTK organized a program to strengthen the competencies of madrasah teachers and educators. The participants included madrasah teachers and principals. The main focus of this program was to provide in-depth understanding to teachers about contextual learning and religious

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moderation, aiming to be an effective tool for them in the teaching-learning process (Gultom, 2022).

On Wednesday, May 15, 2024, the program was officially opened by Thobib Al Asyhar. In his speech, Thobib delivered an inspirational message to the participants, emphasizing the importance of self-confidence for a teacher in carrying out their duties. With great enthusiasm, Thobib stated, "As long as we have the conviction that we can, then we can." (Asyhar, 2024). Thobib also added that any teaching method would achieve success if it is rooted in the strong conviction of the educator.

In the context of this training, Thobib hoped that madrasah teachers could effectively apply contextual learning. By doing so, they would be able to create more relevant and meaningful learning experiences for students. Furthermore, Thobib urged madrasah teachers to continue developing themselves and making positive contributions to the field of education. He emphasized that this program is not just a training but also an important momentum in the effort to improve the quality of education in madrasahs. This will shape future generations who are intelligent and have noble character (Firmansyah and Suryana, 2022).

Factors Contributing to Religious Moderation

Factors Contributing to the Limited Dominance of Religious Moderation in Madrasahs:

1. Complex Social Context

The social context surrounding madrasahs is often complex, with diverse community groups, cultural backgrounds, and varying religious understandings. These challenges can influence the acceptance and implementation of religious moderation within madrasahs.

2. High Intolerance Trends

There is a high trend of intolerance in the public sphere, particularly in digital media. This can affect individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards religious moderation, making it difficult for it to dominate the public space.

3. Diverse Management and Curriculum

Madrasahs exhibit variations in management styles and curricula, depending on the institution and region. These differences can affect the consistency and approaches used to teach religious moderation.

4. Role of Teachers and Educational Leaders

The role of teachers and educational leaders is crucial in shaping understanding and practice of religious moderation in madrasahs. However, not all teachers and educational leaders possess adequate understanding and competency in teaching religious moderation.

5. Diverse Backgrounds and Experiences of Individuals

Individuals in madrasahs have diverse backgrounds and life experiences. This can influence their understanding and acceptance of religious moderation.

6. Dynamics of Social Interaction in the Educational Environment

Social interactions within the educational environment, both among students and between students and teachers, can impact the spread and implementation of

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religious moderation. Power imbalances, group pressures, or conflicts can hinder the dominance of religious moderation.

Addressing these factors requires a comprehensive approach that includes promoting tolerance and countering intolerance, providing teacher training programs on religious moderation, creating standardized curricula that emphasize religious moderation, fostering inclusive and respectful social interactions in the educational environment, and engaging the wider community in promoting the values of religious moderation in madrasahs. These efforts aim to create an environment that encourages the dominance of religious moderation and its positive impact on society.

To address these challenges, collaborative efforts among madrasahs, the government, communities, and relevant institutions are needed. Strengthening teachers' competencies, developing curricula that integrate the values of religious moderation, and increasing understanding and active participation of the community in promoting inclusive and tolerant education are important steps to enhance the dominance of religious moderation in madrasahs and the public sphere as a whole.

Religious moderation as a contextual learning tool becomes an important subject in strengthening the competencies of madrasah teachers and educational personnel (Gultom, 2022). This event aims to strengthen the role of madrasahs in teaching the values of religious moderation as part of the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024 and the priority programs of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. In his presentation, Nur Kafid stated that religious moderation has become the main focus due to the high trend of intolerance in the public sphere, especially on digital platforms (Khafid, 2024).

Nur Kafid explained that there are several factors contributing to the lack of dominance of religious moderation in the public sphere, such as the complexity of diversity in society, variations in management and curricula, the important role of teachers and educational leaders, diverse backgrounds and experiences of individuals, and the dynamics of social interaction in the educational environment (Khafid, 2024).

Nur Kafid acknowledged that the curriculum and educational personnel play a crucial role in the transformation of religious knowledge. He emphasized the need for the curriculum to integrate the values of religious moderation through contributive, adaptive, transformative, and social action approaches. Teachers, as interpreters and implementers of the curriculum, play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of peaceful and tolerant Islam (Khafid, 2024).

Nur Kafid also emphasized the importance of a cultural approach as an effective way to convey the substance of religious moderation. By involving cultural, social, psychological, and ethical elements in education, Nur Kafid stated that it can help internalize the values of moderation. Additionally, direct experiences with diversity through interreligious literacy programs, visits to places of worship, and interactions with multicultural communities are important strategies in teaching tolerance (Abror Mhd. et al., 2020). After delivering this material, Nur Kafid hopes that madrasahs can be more active in prioritizing religious moderation and making it a holistic and contextual cultural, social, and personal system. He urged everyone to actively participate in realizing inclusive and tolerant education (Khafid, 2024).

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Religious moderation as a contextual learning tool presented in educational institutions can influence people's perspectives and religious practices (Abidin, 2021). The curriculum and educational personnel have a significant role in the transformation of religious knowledge. The curriculum becomes a contested arena for the recognition of "official" interpretations of religious doctrines. Teachers, as interpreters and implementers of the curriculum, play a significant role in shaping students' understanding (Aziz, 2023). Teachers are readers and interpreters of the curriculum used (Salamah, Amirudin, and Sitika, 2022). The curriculum design needs to prioritize promoting peaceful and tolerant Islamic narratives by integrating moderation values through four approaches: contributive, adaptive, transformative, and social action (Husniyatus Salamah Zainiyati, 2016); (Siswanto, 2019); (Sauqi Futagi, 2018). There is a need for a paradigm shift in education towards digital natives, integrating technology into the learning process (Wahyu, 2020); (Samsul Kurniawan, 2019).

Tolerance competencies are no longer limited to understanding Islam but also extend to other groups and religions. Tolerance is not only understood as the will of God but also manifested through dialogue and cooperation as fellow citizens (Abu Amar, 2018). A cultural approach is crucial in teaching religious moderation. It involves recognition and adjustment to the social context, including cultural, social, psychological, and ethical elements (Hefner, 2021). Active involvement of individuals, communities, and institutions in collective actions aimed at changing values, norms, symbols, and daily life patterns is necessary (Sztompka, 2005).

Contextualizing the substance of religious moderation is important to make it easily understood and practiced. For example, the application of "gentle Islam" that integrates the values of religious moderation into everyday life (Robby, 2020). Religious moderation needs to be integrated as a discourse and practice (Makruf, 2021). In this approach, a holistic and cultural relativism perspective is needed. Religious moderation should be seen as a holistic and contextual cultural, social, and personal system (Zulkifli, 2021). This means recognizing cultural diversity and social contexts in teaching religious moderation. By applying a holistic and contextual cultural approach, it is hoped that religious moderation can be effectivelycommunicated and internalized by students.

To promote tolerance and understanding, direct experiences with diversity are crucial. Interreligious literacy programs, visits to places of worship, and interactions with multicultural communities can provide students with firsthand exposure to different religions and cultures (Abror Mhd. et al., 2020). These experiences can help break down stereotypes, foster empathy, and promote respect for diversity.

In summary, addressing the challenges related to the dominance of religious moderation in madrasahs and the public sphere requires collaborative efforts among madrasahs, the government, communities, and relevant institutions. Strengthening teachers' competencies, developing curricula that integrate the values of religious moderation, and promoting direct experiences with diversity are key strategies to enhance the understanding and practice of religious moderation. By actively involving all stakeholders and adopting a holistic and contextual approach to

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teaching religious moderation, it is possible to create inclusive and tolerant educational environments in madrasahs and society as a whole.

Religious moderation plays an important role for students in the following aspects:

a. Balanced understanding of religion

Religious moderation helps students develop a balanced understanding of their religion. This involves comprehensively understanding the values of religion and being aware of the importance of practicing religious teachings in a moderate and socially relevant manner.

b. Tolerance and appreciation of differences

Religious moderation encourages students to have an attitude of tolerance and appreciation towards religious and belief differences. This helps create an inclusive environment where students respect and accept diversity.

c. Prevention of extremism and radicalism

Teaching religious moderation to students is also an effort to prevent extremism and radicalism. By understanding the importance of practicing religion in a balanced and peaceful manner, students become better able to identify and reject extreme or radical understandings.

d. Character development

Religious moderation helps students in character development. This involves teaching values such as compassion, justice, honesty, and generosity, which are integral parts of religious teachings. Students who practice religious moderation tend to have positive attitudes and behaviors in their daily lives.

e. Empowerment of students

By understanding religious moderation, students become more empowered in their lives. They can make wise decisions, maintain balance, and face challenges with a level-headed approach based on moderate religious principles. (Pahmuddin 2023)

In summary, religious moderation has a significant impact on students' understanding, attitudes, and behaviors. It helps them develop a balanced understanding of religion, promotes tolerance and appreciation of differences, prevents extremism, contributes to character development, and empowers students to lead meaningful lives.

Overall, religious moderation is important for students because it helps them develop a balanced understanding of religion, promotes tolerance and appreciation of differences, prevents extremism, shapes good character, and empowers them to live their daily lives based on moderate religious principles. As mentioned earlier, direct experiences with diversity through interreligious literacy programs, visits to places of worship, and interactions with multicultural communities are important strategies in teaching tolerance and religious moderation. This is in line with research conducted by Mukmin et al. (2021).

Direct encounters with religious diversity can help individuals understand and appreciate religious differences more deeply. By visiting places of worship of other religions, individuals can see and experience religious practices firsthand, gaining understanding of the beliefs and values held by those communities.

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Additionally, living and interacting within a multicultural community provides opportunities to interact directly with non-Muslim individuals. Through daily interactions, individuals can build a better understanding of their lives, traditions, and cultures. This can reduce stereotypes and prejudices that may exist, and strengthen the understanding of the values of religious moderation. Thus, direct encounters with religious diversity and living in a multicultural community can serve as effective learning models in teaching religious moderation. It enables individuals to build tolerance, mutual respect, and expand their insights into other religions, thereby shaping a more inclusive and harmonious society.

The issue of religious moderation.

The issue of religious moderation in schools in a specific context and school environment. Some problems in schools in NTB (Nusa Tenggara Barat) that arise in teaching religious moderation include:

a. Religious extremism

Some students may be exposed to extremist or radical views that contradict the values of moderation. This can be a challenge in teaching tolerance, appreciation of differences, and a balanced understanding of religion.

b. Intolerance

Students in the school environment may display intolerance towards different religions or beliefs. This may be due to a lack of understanding or limited experience with religious diversity.

c. Interreligious conflicts

When students have strong religious beliefs, interreligious conflicts can arise in schools. This can disrupt a harmonious learning environment and affect students' learning experiences.

d. Imbalanced curriculum

The school curriculum may not place enough emphasis on religious moderation or may tend to teach extremist religious views. This can lead to an imbalance in religious understanding among students.

e. Resource limitations

Schools may face resource limitations in implementing educational programs that promote religious moderation. Limited funding, time, and teacher training can be barriers to addressing these issues.(Suhailah 2019)

To address these problems, some steps that can be taken include:

a. Enhancing teacher training

Teachers need to receive adequate training on religious moderation, multicultural teaching, and conflict management so that they can effectively address these challenges.

b. Balanced curriculum

The school curriculum needs to incorporate teaching materials that promote religious moderation, tolerance, and appreciation of religious differences. This can include emphasizing universal principles, interreligious dialogue, and a balanced understanding of religion.

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c. Creating an inclusive school climate

Schools need to create a safe and inclusive climate for students from various religious backgrounds. This includes adopting anti-bullying policies and encouraging collaboration and cooperation among students from different religions.

d. Engaging with religious communities

Schools can collaborate with local religious communities to provide direct experiences with religious diversity, visits to places of worship, and interreligious literacy programs.

e. Parent education

Involving parents in education about religious moderation and the importance of tolerance can help create broader support for these values among students. (Khotimah and Muchtar 2022)

By addressing these issues and taking proactive measures, schools in NTB can foster an environment that promotes religious moderation, tolerance, and understanding among students. The participation of school principals and madrasa teachers in building religious moderation is very enthusiastic. Steps that can be taken by school principals are first, creating inclusive policies. Principals can develop school policies that encourage inclusivity, tolerance and respect for religious differences. This policy must emphasize the importance of religious moderation in the school environment and provide guidance for teachers, students and school staff on how to practice these values. (Bima Praditya et al. 2022)

Second, by supporting teacher training, school principals can ensure that teachers receive adequate training on religious moderation, multicultural teaching, and conflict management. This can include training on how to deal with extremist views or intolerance in the classroom, as well as how to promote interfaith dialogue and a balanced understanding of religion. (Khotimah and Muchtar 2022) Third, building an inclusive school climate so school principals are obliged to create a safe school climate, inclusive, and friendly to students from various religious backgrounds. This involves adopting anti-bullying policies that protect students from religion-based discrimination, as well as encouraging collaboration and cooperation between students of different religions.(Pradina et al. 2021)

Fourth, integrating religious moderation in the curriculum as a school principal can ensure that religious moderation is integrated in the school curriculum. This may include introducing material about religious diversity, teaching the universal values of peaceful religions, and promoting a balanced understanding of religion. School principals can also involve teachers in developing materials and activities that support religious moderation. (Ilham 2019) Fifth, collaboration with religious communities. Steps taken by school principals can be to establish partnerships with religious communities around the school to support religious moderation education. This could involve visiting places of worship, inviting religious leaders to give lectures or discussions, or holding interfaith literacy programs. This kind of collaboration can help students gain direct experience with religious diversity and expand their understanding of religion. (Mokalu et al. 2022)

Sixth, involve parents in education. That is why school principals can involve parents in education about religious moderation and the importance of

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tolerance. This can be done through parent meetings, group discussions, or training programs for parents. By involving parents, school principals can strengthen support for the values of religious moderation at home and in the community. (Martan 2020) Implementing religious moderation in schools requires commitment from the principal and involves the entire school community. With these steps, school principals can create an environment that supports balanced understanding, tolerance, and respect for religious differences in schools.

CONCLUSION

Religious moderation has an important role in education to develop balanced understanding, tolerance, prevent extremism, shape good character, and empower students. In an educational context, there are several strategies that can be used to teach religious moderation to students. First, curriculum design needs to emphasize mainstreaming a peaceful and tolerant Islamic narrative. Second, a cultural approach is very important in teaching religious moderation. Third, direct experience with religious diversity through visits to places of worship, interfaith literacy programs, and interactions with multicultural communities also play an important role in teaching religious tolerance and moderation. Fourth, digital education can also be used as a means to integrate technology in the learning process. These approaches are expected to help students develop a balanced understanding of religion, promote tolerance and respect for differences, prevent extremism, shape good character, and empower them to live their daily lives with moderate religious principles as an important basis in inclusive and harmonious education.

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