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## UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS MODERATION PERSPECTIVES OF MAN TEACHERS IN ACEH

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**Abstract:** *Intolerance is a problem faced by Indonesian society to this day. And to overcome this problem, educational institutions are one of the institutions that have an important role in instilling religious moderation. The purpose of this study was to obtain information about the knowledge of Madrasah Aliyah teachers in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar about religious moderation and to find out the implementation of religious moderation in the teaching and learning process and what values of religious moderation are built by teachers at MAN Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. This study used a qualitative approach with interview methods, observation, and document analysis to obtain data from the principal, teachers, and students. The results showed that teachers' understanding of religious moderation was generally good, especially for those who had attended training. Moderation values, such as justice (adl), balance (tawazun), simplicity (i'tidal), and unity and ukhwwah, were internalized through various learning methods, including discussion, group work, and field studies. However, there are several challenges in implementing religious moderation in madrasas, such as variations in teacher understanding, the dominance of lecture methods, and the influence of the social environment that still has conservative or extreme views. In addition, limited support for resources and ongoing training are also obstacles in optimizing the implementation of this concept. The implications of this study indicate that increasing teacher training, diversifying learning methods, and integrating religious moderation values in all subjects need to be done systematically. Support from madrasas and the government is needed to ensure that religious moderation values can be implemented effectively so that students can develop into inclusive, tolerant individuals who have a balanced understanding of religion.*

**Keywords:** *Religious Moderation Knowledge; Madrasah Teachers Understanding; Indonesian Islamic Schools.*

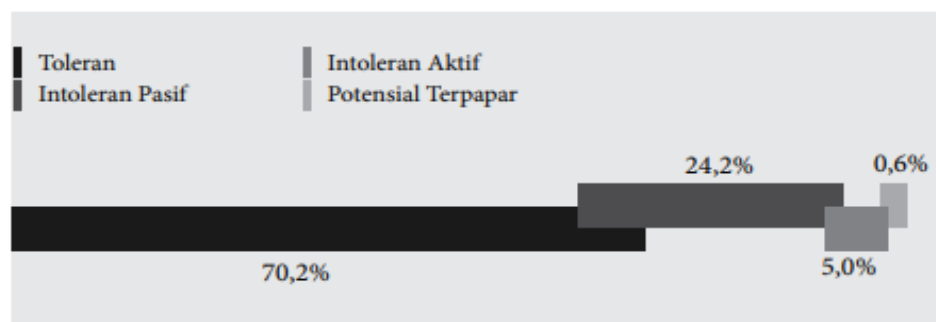
## INTRODUCTION

Teachers are the ones who introduce knowledge to students. In the past, students learned everything from their teachers; teachers introduced reading, writing, and other sciences. Now, along with the advancement of science and the occurrence of extraordinary technological developments, teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge, a student can gain knowledge from browsing the internet which provides hundreds of applications to read (Nurhidayat et al., 2024).

Although many applications provide various information, the teacher's authority in conveying knowledge to students is an element that cannot be eliminated and replaced by technological sophistication (Hill & Chin, 2018). Therefore, in conveying the values of religious moderation to students, it is necessary to know of it. This is because teachers must instill noble religious values and realize national education's goals.

Social facts show that various intolerant dynamics are still high in Indonesia. The intolerant attitudes that occur in Indonesia are actually mostly related to religion, excessive fanaticism is the main source of intolerance in Indonesia (Nurhakim et al, 2024; Halida 2023).

Figure 1. Categorization of Intolerant Adolescent Status



Source: Setara Institute 2023

Referring to the data above, it can be seen that 70.2% of teenagers or high school students fall into the category of tolerant teenagers, 24.2% are passive intolerant teenagers, 5% are active intolerant teenagers, and 0.6% are teenagers who are potentially exposed. The degree of tolerance of high school students/adolescents in 2023 shows a positive tendency with 70.2% having a tolerant attitude. This figure shows that the social capital of student tolerance is still quite strong. This finding is in line with the trend of tolerance conditions based on the 'Tolerant City Index (IKT)' and also the Interfaith Harmony Index, which generally shows that Indonesian public tolerance is still quite high. In this survey, five factors were found that can influence tolerant/intolerant attitudes in teenagers, including understanding of national insight, intensity of social media use, respondents' daily activities, religious attitudes, and respondents' socio-economic conditions. All of these variables show a positive correlation as a shaper of student character.

Then, to increase the understanding of religious moderation, educational institutions become the hope for the nation's people. Also, educational institutions are the hope for

the people of the nation to instill religious moderation. However, when teachers do not have knowledge about religious moderation, and what the values of religious moderation are, it does not rule out the possibility when the wrong knowledge is conveyed to students, and it does not rule out the possibility that students will be wrong in applying it. When the values of moderation are misunderstood, it can result in the collapse of human values and the fading of values of the holy book's teachings. Therefore, teachers as one of the elements of the spreader of *washilah* to strengthen the unity and integrity of the archipelago, foster mutual respect, and respect, and spread moderate religious understanding and teachings (Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2018).

Educational institutions have a strategic role to play in breaking the cycle of violence. An educative approach for half of the learners can be implemented in peace education that is integrated into the school curriculum, training in constructive conflict resolution, mediation and negotiation by peers is a joint effort so that the Indonesian nation becomes a reconciling nation (Purwanto et al., 2023). Broad and non-partial religious knowledge must be taught in educational institutions so that students have a foundation of religious understanding that is not narrow.

Therefore, the role of religious teachers is needed in instilling religious moderation in the life of this multicultural nation and state. Religious moderation as described by Fahrudin in Akhmadi, is the meaning of being balanced, in the middle, not excessive, not *truth clime*, not using extreme theological legitimacy, claiming that his group is the most correct, neutral, and not affiliated with certain political parties (Akhmadi, 2019).

This research is important to find out the extent of Madrasah teachers' knowledge in understanding the concept of religious moderation how the implementation of religious moderation in the teaching and learning process and what are the values of religious moderation that are built by teachers in MAN Kota Banda Aceh and MAN Aceh Besar.

The purpose of this study is to obtain information on the knowledge of Madrasah Aliyah teachers in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar about religious moderation as well as to find out the implementation of religious moderation in the teaching and learning process and what are the values of religious moderation that are built by teachers in MAN Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. These three objectives are to be obtained in this study as a form of intellectual property.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. This approach was chosen to understand the phenomena that occur in depth by exploring data from various relevant sources (Cohen et al., 2017). This study was conducted in four madrasahs in Banda Aceh, namely MAN 1 Banda Aceh, MAN 3 Banda Aceh, MAN 1 Aceh Besar, and MAN 4 Aceh Besar. The location of this study was chosen because the four madrasahs are favorite madrasahs that have the most students in Banda Aceh. In addition, these four madrasahs are also madrasahs that implement religious moderation practices in learning and the madrasah environment. The subjects of this study consisted of

madrasah principals and teachers to see how they understand religious moderation (Creswell, 2014).

The data in this study were collected through several techniques, namely, in-depth interviews conducted with madrasah principals and teachers to obtain more comprehensive information, observation with direct observation of activities related to the focus of the study, and documentation by collecting documents or archives that support data analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to look at the data. This method involves reducing the amount of data by choosing and organizing the most important information, showing the data in the form of a story or a table to make it easier to understand, and coming to a conclusion by looking for patterns and relationships in the data to answer research questions. Then, to ensure data validity, this study uses triangulation techniques, namely source triangulation by comparing data from various sources, method triangulation by using more than one data collection technique, and researcher triangulation by involving more than one researcher or asking for confirmation from relevant parties (Creswell, 2014).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Madrasah Teachers' Knowledge of Religious Moderation

In Madrasah, this concept of moderation has become its jargon because it connects the thoughts that will be faced in the future, where Madrasah alumni will be faced in the world they live through the conflict between thoughts that are too free/liberal or thoughts that are too hard/extreme, so this is also a combination of meanings that every teacher in Madrasah, especially religious teachers, has a very important role because they have enough knowledge to instill the values of moderation education to students so that students are expected to be able to balance it, meaning that these children know to face problems scientifically with something that is the basis. Then to instill an understanding of religious moderation in students, of course, teachers must first have a good and complete understanding of religious moderation so that understanding this concept can be taught well to all students. Based on interviews conducted with the four heads of the madrasahs studied, it was explained that the understanding of teachers of State Madrasahs in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar about religious moderation was quite good because, on average, the teachers had attended religious moderation training, and some of them had become religious moderation trainers for other teachers in their madrasahs. So that with this condition, the application of religious moderation in the madrasah environment can be implemented well. Not only in the madrasah environment, but the concept of religious moderation has also been included in the learning curriculum in the madrasah. The instillation of moderation values in Madrasahs is also included in the joints of the curriculum, syllabus, and joints of subjects, especially religious subjects. If we look at the Egyptian scholars in the past, especially at Al-Azhar, they were moderate scholars who were truly *tasamuh* scholars who still use their thoughts to this day. In the

learning process, or what we call the Learning Plan (RPP), the concept of tolerance is included in the concept of moderation so that this concept is integrated with learning, meaning that when this learning takes place, the concept of moderation is not something that is then taught partially but is integrated into the learning process. In the learning process, this Madrasah usually uses the lecture method which is the most effective method to instill the values of moderation values to students, as well as when providing learning in class about fiqh on prayer material for example, it teaches about the requirements for valid prayer, the pillars of prayer, prayer movements or also muhtilati prayer, well this is included in the elements of moderation that various kinds of prayers use the qunut prayer when praying dawn, some do not from this khilafiyah difference then included in the elements of moderation, the first is how we must have a basis in determining which one is our basis in doing so, then the second is not to blame others when we are different from others when we see others not using the qunut prayer when praying dawn, it is only a matter of khilafiyah, there is no problem whatsoever, the important thing is that each has a basis. That is one of the concepts of moderation that is included in the learning process.

The implementation of religious moderation in madrasahs faces various challenges even though this concept has become an integral part of the education system. One of the main challenges is the variation in teachers' understanding of religious moderation. Although most teachers at State Madrasah Aliyah in Banda Aceh City and Aceh Besar have undergone training, not all have a complete and in-depth understanding, especially for those who have not received direct training. This can cause differences in the way the values of moderation are conveyed to students. In addition, the learning method, which is still dominated by lectures, is also an obstacle. Although considered effective in conveying concepts and theories, this approach does not provide enough space for students to build critical understanding and direct experience in applying the values of religious moderation. Another challenge arises in the integration of religious moderation into the curriculum. Although this concept has been included in the syllabus and religious subjects, its implementation in other subjects is still limited. Non-religious teachers may not understand how to teach the values of moderation in their fields of study. In addition, the influence of the social and cultural environment also plays a role in the learning process. Teachers often face pressure from the surrounding community or parents who have more conservative or extreme views, creating a dilemma in balancing religious moderation teachings with community expectations. Limited support and resources are also obstacles. Although teacher training has been carried out, ongoing professional development programs, contextual teaching materials, and academic supervision still need to be improved. Without adequate support from madrasahs and the government, teachers will have difficulty adapting more innovative methods in teaching religious moderation. Therefore, a strategy is needed that includes increasing training, diversifying learning methods, preparing clear technical guidelines, and ongoing support so that religious moderation can be implemented effectively in the madrasah educational environment.

## Implementation of Religious Moderation in the Teaching and Learning Process

As the next generation of the nation, of course, they must be given a broad understanding of how to apply Islam which is *rahmatan lilalamin*, and make Islam the basis for getting along with others by respecting differences. This requires the teacher's diligence in instilling religious moderation. The implementation of religious moderation in the teaching and learning process at MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar is applied through the following learning methods:

### 1. Discussion Method

The discussion method provides many benefits for students in the teaching and learning process, namely training students to think critically and openly so that each student has a broad insight from other students (Teachers Guide, 2024). Then by discussing, learners have a democratic nature because they can express their opinions still in the discussion forum. Then by discussing, students have an attitude of mutual respect for other people's different opinions, by discussing students can increase knowledge and experience sourced from the results of the discussion. By discussing, students' thinking skills can be honed, thinking critically, creatively, and argumentatively, and training students' mentality in expressing opinions in public.

Teachers in the implementation of religious moderation during the teaching and learning process apply the discussion method, the teacher provides flexibility for students to express their knowledge of each student, discussing how students can get to know each other's characters and how to respond and express a problem with a predetermined theme. The application of this method trains students to think critically, openly, and democratically in understanding Islamic teachings. Through discussion, students learn to express opinions and appreciate different perspectives so that they are more accustomed to accepting differences without feeling superior to their own beliefs. The tolerant attitude formed in this discussion becomes an important basis for the practice of religious moderation in their educational environment and social life.

### 2. Group Work

Islam teaches its followers to help each other in goodness as explained in Al-Quran Surah Al-Maidah verse 2:

وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ وَلَا تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ ﴿٢﴾

"..... and help you in (doing) righteousness and piety, and do not help in sin and transgression. And fear Allah, Verily, He is severe in punishment (Al-Maidah verse: 2)"

The word *al-birru* means kindness. Doing good regardless of one's social status, religion, and beliefs. Because kindness is the need of all mankind. Group work is an activity of mutual help in learning. Learners are required to cooperate in carrying out the tasks that they are assigned and given to learners. Help each other solve the problems given by the teacher. Group work in its definition, is the presentation of

material by giving tasks to learners who have been grouped to achieve goals (Ramayulis, 1994).

The essence of the group work method applied by this teacher is to work, helping each other in solving a problem in learning. For an educator, the group work method is applied because it trains students to understand the meaning of togetherness. In addition, group work has many benefits as described by Zakiah Darajdat, namely fostering cooperation between students, gaining mastery over teaching materials, fostering and maintaining a sense of unity in a group, training students' leadership, developing a sense of comradeship and, providing opportunities for students to actualize themselves in planning something for the common good, directing students' personal growth and development in social life (Darajat, 2008).

Therefore, the group work method applied by teachers in implementing religious moderation in the teaching and learning process is part of the teachers' strategy in instilling religious moderation for students so that students are open and not exclusive in religion. Because this method helps students understand the importance of togetherness and mutual cooperation in practicing Islamic teachings. In groups, they work together without distinguishing social status or differences in perspective so that inclusive attitudes and mutual respect can grow naturally. In addition, group work also trains leadership and provides experience in building broader relationships with others, in line with the spirit of Islam, *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which prioritizes cooperation in goodness.

### 3. Field Trip Method

One of the other methods used by teachers in implementing religious moderation is a *study tour*. This study tour method is defined as a learning method that is outside the classroom, visiting the intended places outside the classroom to learn directly from the intended object. Ariyanto defines the tour method as a teaching method that is carried out outside the classroom by inviting students to visit places outside the classroom. Pay attention to environmental conditions or events that have to do with the learning material being discussed or shown directly to certain objects (Ariyanto, 2014).

The direct involvement of students can help students develop themselves, respond, appreciate, and actualize the knowledge students obtain in the classroom, then associate with the surrounding environment (Eliason, 2008). This tour work method has several benefits, among others: Learners can learn directly about the objects visited, learners can consolidate theories learned at school with the reality of the application applied to the objects visited, learners can live the practical experience of science that has been obtained, learners can obtain more accurate information by conducting interviews or by listening to lectures given by local officials, can learn several subject matter at once and integrally (Ariyanto, 2014).

The use of the tour method by teachers in implementing religious moderation is part of the teacher's efforts to provide life experience with other people who are different from culture, culture, beliefs, and social status. Because religious moderation

needs to be practised in the lives of students. Of course, teachers must direct, guide, and show students the importance of religious moderation when visiting predetermined places following the learning material explained in the classroom. With this method, students are given direct experience in dealing with diversity in society. By visiting places with different cultural backgrounds, customs, and beliefs, students not only understand the concept of religious moderation in theory but also see how these values are applied in real life. This experience forms an awareness that diversity is a reality that must be accepted with a moderate attitude and mutual respect.

Thus, the combination of these three methods forms a broader understanding of religious moderation, making it not just a concept but also a value that is internalized and practiced by students in everyday life. However, even so, the implementation of these three methods has several challenges that need to be considered, including, first, in the application of the discussion method, for example, there may be obstacles if students are not used to thinking critically or are still reluctant to express their opinions because they are afraid of being wrong or being rejected by their peers. In addition, unfocused discussions also risk triggering unconstructive debates, especially if the topic being discussed is sensitive. To overcome this challenge, teachers need to guide the discussion by providing an understanding that differences of opinion are normal and must be addressed with an open attitude and respect for other perspectives. In addition, the use of case study-based discussion methods or ethical dilemmas can help students better understand the importance of religious moderation in real-life contexts. Second, in the group work method, the obstacle that often arises is the lack of active participation from all group members, where often only a few students are active while others tend to be passive. In addition, differences in levels of understanding and learning styles in groups can cause inequality in the contribution of each student. To overcome this, teachers can implement a clearer task division system and provide individual evaluations of the contributions of each group member. In addition, periodic rotation of group members can also help students to be more open in working together with friends from different backgrounds.

Third, the field study method, although very effective in providing direct experience of religious moderation, also has its own challenges. One of the main obstacles is the limited budget and time available to conduct visits to various relevant places. In addition, it is possible that students only see these visits as recreational activities without really understanding the essence of the experiences they get. To overcome this challenge, teachers can prepare field studies in a more structured way, for example, by giving observation tasks that must be reported by students or by holding reflection sessions after the visit. Another alternative is to bring resource persons from different communities into the classroom to provide direct insight into diversity and the practice of religious moderation.

The success of implementing this method is also greatly influenced by external factors, such as teacher readiness, school culture, and support from the curriculum. Teachers who have a deep understanding of religious moderation and good

pedagogical skills will be better able to manage productive discussions, encourage collaboration in groups, and guide students in field studies in an effective manner. A school culture that supports inclusivity and openness to differences also plays a significant role in the success of this method. If the school has an environment that tends to be exclusive or does not provide enough space for diversity, then efforts to instill religious moderation through learning will face greater obstacles. In addition, support from a curriculum that explicitly includes the values of religious moderation in learning materials will help teachers design more systematic and integrated learning strategies.

### **Religious Moderation Values Built by Teachers**

According to Soemantri Purwanto, value is something that is contained in the human conscience which gives more basis and moral principles which are standards of beauty and efficiency or the needs of the heart (potential). The values of religious moderation built by teachers at MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar are as follows:

#### **1. Fair (Adl)**

The form of fairness built by the teacher in his interview statement is that students do not choose friends in making friends. The teacher never forbids students to be friends with anyone, and that is also what makes students able to make friends with anyone in class regardless of their background. In addition, in building fair values, the teacher also performs several roles as transmitter, organizer, and transformer to students. His roles provide a positive imitation such as the teacher reprimanding students who play football outside of sports learning hours, the teacher does not look at anyone's background, and he explains to students if playing football outside sports hours can cause harm to other students who are passing around the school.

#### **2. Balanced (*Tawazun*)**

The value of balance in the sense that it describes the perspective, attitude, and commitment to always side with justice. This value is related to the previous value, where the teachers agree that the value of balance here is given to students as a form of limitation in making friends, which is always reminded by teachers to their students not to offend the beliefs of friends of different ethnicities, races, and religions.

#### **3. Simplicity (*I'tidal*)**

Modesty in religious moderation means not religion. The teacher stated that besides needing provisions for mutual respect and respect for others, students must still be given an understanding and increase in faith and piety in their Islamic beliefs. This aims to equip students so that they are not easily carried away in further education.

#### **4. Unity and Unity (*Ittihad wa Ukhwah*)**

The methods used are very varied, among others, this value can be built through Monday ceremonies with a student pledge that is read together with all students. The student pledge contains how to uphold diversity and unity. The implementation said

by the teacher is that students remind each other. When someone is sick or affected by a disaster, other students also pray for them. This behaviour in MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, where students have strong solidarity, shows their unity and brotherhood.

In MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, the values of religious moderation are internalized through various systematic pedagogical strategies. One method used is modeling, where teachers demonstrate fairness without discriminating against students based on their backgrounds. For example, teachers reprimand students who play ball outside of class hours without favoritism so that students learn to be fair in making friends and not to discriminate. In addition, discussion and reflection methods are also applied in learning, especially in instilling the value of balance (*tawazun*). Teachers often hold discussions that teach the importance of respecting other people's beliefs and remind students not to offend friends of different religions or cultures. As a result, students are more aware of the importance of tolerance and are able to maintain harmony in their relationships.

In addition, internalization of the values of moderation is also carried out through the method of habituation and daily rituals. One example is the student pledge that is read together during the flag ceremony every Monday. This pledge instills the values of diversity and unity, which has an impact on increasing students' sense of solidarity. This can be seen in the habit of students praying for each other and helping friends who are sick or experiencing disasters. Another method applied is the integration of values in subjects, such as in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), where the value of simplicity (*I'tidal*) is taught by emphasizing the importance of living simply and increasing faith without excessive attitudes. This understanding helps students to live religious lives in a balanced and tolerant manner.

Based on interviews with teachers and observations made, it was found that these strategies have proven effective in forming inclusive and moderate student attitudes and behaviors. Students of MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar tend not to sort friends based on ethnic or religious backgrounds, show a high awareness of diversity, and have strong solidarity with others. Thus, the pedagogical approach applied by teachers in instilling the values of religious moderation has had a positive impact on the formation of student character that is more tolerant, just, and united in diversity.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the understanding of madrasah teachers towards religious moderation in MAN Kota Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar is quite good, especially since most of the teachers have attended religious moderation training. Furthermore, the concept of religious moderation is not only taught in religious subjects but is also integrated into the curriculum and learning methods, such as discussions, group work, and field studies. This strategy helps students develop inclusive, critical, and tolerant attitudes in dealing with differences. However, there are several challenges in its

implementation, such as variations in teachers' understanding of religious moderation, limitations of learning methods that are still predominantly lecture-based, and lack of ongoing support for resources and academic supervision.

The implications of this study are the need to improve training for teachers so that their understanding of religious moderation is more evenly distributed and in-depth. In addition, diversification of learning methods needs to be strengthened with a more participatory and contextual approach to provide students with real experience in implementing moderation values. Madrasahs and the government also need to provide clearer technical guidance and ongoing support, both in the form of academic supervision and the provision of appropriate teaching materials. Thus, the implementation of religious moderation in educational environments can be more effective and have a positive impact in building a more inclusive and tolerant generation.

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