

Analysis of Islamic Religious Education Policies in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Public Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policies in strengthening religious moderation in public schools. PAI plays a strategic role in shaping the character of students who are religious, tolerant, and patriotic. However, educational practices often face challenges in the form of religious exclusivism and a lack of understanding of moderation in the school environment. This article uses a qualitative descriptive approach with an analysis of national education policies, specifically those of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The analysis shows that the implementation of PAI policies has been directed at strengthening religious moderation through inclusive curricula, teacher training, and religious activities. However, there remains a gap between normative policies and practices in the field. Therefore, synergy is needed between the government, teachers, and the community to realize moderate and tolerant religious education.

Keywords: Islamic Religious Education, Religious Moderation, Educational Policy, Public Schools

Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is an important component in the national education system that functions to shape the character and morals of students so that they have an inclusive and tolerant understanding of religion. In the midst of increasing globalization and the complexity of social life, religious education is required to be able to instill moderate Islamic values and in accordance with the spirit of Indonesian nationality. In this context, the concept of religious moderation is relevant to be developed in PAI learning, especially in public schools that have diverse student backgrounds.

According to the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2019),

religious moderation is a religious way of viewing, attitudes, and practices that emphasizes a balance between religious practice and respect for differences. Strengthening moderation is carried out through national policies, including the Religious Moderation Roadmap 2019-2024 and the integration of moderation values into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum. This policy is in line with the spirit of Freedom of Learning launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture, where learning is directed to develop the character of Pancasila students who have faith, piety, and noble character.

A number of studies also show the importance of the role of PAI policies in strengthening religious moderation. Noviani & Yanuarti, (2023) emphasized that the Merdeka Learning curriculum provides space for PAI teachers to internalize the values of moderation in a contextual and participatory manner. Similarly, Ikhwan (2023) highlights that Islamic education has a strategic responsibility in fostering a young generation that is able to appreciate differences and reject extremism.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the PAI policy in strengthening religious moderation in public schools still faces challenges. Some teachers do not fully understand the concept of moderation, while some people still consider the term as an attempt to secularize religious values (Habibie et al., 2021). Therefore, an analysis of PAI policies is needed to understand to what extent the implementation of the policy is able to strengthen religious moderation in the educational environment.

Based on the preliminary description, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policy has a very strategic position in strengthening religious moderation in public schools. This effort is carried out through the preparation of national policies such as the Religious Moderation Roadmap and the integration of moderation values in the Independent Curriculum. Religious education not only serves as a means of moral formation, but also as an instrument to foster tolerance, respect for diversity, and reject extremism.

However, the implementation of the policy still faces obstacles in terms of understanding and implementation in the field. There is still a need to improve the competence of PAI teachers, support of educational institutions, and community participation so that religious moderation can be effectively internalized. Thus, the analysis of PAI policies is important to ensure that the goal of national education, namely forming human beings who have faith, piety, and noble character in the framework of diversity, can truly be achieved.

Methods

1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. The approach is used to analyze Islamic Religious Education (IRE) policies and their implementation in promoting religious moderation in public schools. The qualitative method allows the researcher to explore policy texts, implementation patterns, and stakeholder perceptions in depth.

2. Research Design

- a. The research adopts a policy analysis design, focusing on three main components:
- b. Policy Content Analysis – reviewing the substance of national and school-level IRE policies related to religious moderation.
- c. Implementation Analysis – investigating how policies are applied in classroom practices and school programs.
- d. Impact Analysis – assessing the extent to which these policies contribute to strengthening students' attitudes of religious moderation.

3. Data Sources

a. Primary Data

- 1) Interviews with:
 - a) Islamic Religious Education teachers
 - b) School leaders (principals or vice principals)
 - c) Students participating in IRE classes
- 2) Classroom observations related to IRE learning activities.

b. Secondary Data

- 1) Government policy documents (Kurikulum Merdeka, KMA/Permendikbud, moderation guidelines).
- 2) School documents (lesson plans, annual programs, extracurricular programs).
- 3) Previous research and academic literature.

4. Data Collection Techniques

a. Document Study

Examining curriculum guidelines, policy regulations, lesson plans, and school reports related to religious moderation.

- b. **Semi-Structured Interviews**
Interviews are conducted to gain insights on teachers' understanding, strategies, challenges, and school support in strengthening religious moderation.
 - c. **Observation**
Observing IRE learning processes, school activities, ceremonies, or extracurricular programs that promote religious moderation.
5. **Data Analysis Techniques**
Data analysis uses Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which includes:
- a. **Data Reduction**
Selecting relevant data related to policy content, implementation strategies, and outcomes.
 - b. **Data Display**
Organizing findings in the form of tables, narrative descriptions, thematic mapping, or diagrams.
 - c. **Conclusion Drawing / Verification**
Interpreting the findings and confirming them with data sources to ensure validity.
6. **Data Validity Techniques**
- a. To ensure credibility, the study employs:
 - b. Triangulation of sources (teachers, students, documents)
 - c. Triangulation of methods (interviews, observation, document study)
 - d. Member checking—confirming interview data with participants.
 - e. Peer debriefing—consultation with experts in Islamic education or policy studies.
7. **Ethical Considerations**
- a. Obtaining permission from school authorities.
 - b. Maintaining confidentiality of participants' identities.
 - c. Ensuring voluntary participation.
 - d. Reporting findings objectively and without bias.

Results

1. **Policy Content Related to Strengthening Religious Moderation**
The analysis of national and institutional policy documents reveals that Islamic Religious Education (IRE) policies explicitly incorporate the principles of religious

moderation. Several key elements were identified:

a. Policy Alignment with Moderation Principles

The Merdeka Curriculum, its IRE guidelines, and national moderation frameworks emphasize values such as toleransi, anti-kekerasan, komitmen kebangsaan, and akulturasi budaya lokal. These values are integrated into:

- 1) IRE learning objectives
- 2) Profil Pelajar Pancasila
- 3) Character development programs

b. Integration in Learning Materials

IRE materials include themes such as respectful interaction with people of different faiths, balanced interpretation of Islamic teachings, and the importance of harmony in plural societies. Policy documents provide clear direction for contextual, humanistic, and inclusive teaching approaches.

c. Supportive Institutional Policies

School-level policies, such as student discipline guidelines, extracurricular mandates, and code of conduct documents, reinforce moderation values by encouraging mutual respect and prohibiting discriminatory behavior.

2. Implementation of Policies in Classroom Practices

Field observations and interviews indicate that teachers apply religious moderation values through various pedagogical strategies.

a. Teacher Understanding and Pedagogical Approach

Most IRE teachers demonstrate strong understanding of moderation principles and integrate them into classroom discussions. Teachers often:

- 1) Use dialogue-based learning to explore differences in religious interpretation.
- 2) Apply contextual learning, linking Islamic teachings to real-life social interactions.
- 3) Emphasize rahmatan lil ‘alamin as the foundation of moderate religious behavior.

b. Classroom Activities Supporting Moderation

IRE classrooms incorporate activities designed to cultivate student attitudes, such as:

- 1) Group discussions on tolerance in everyday life

- 2) Case-based analysis of religious diversity in Indonesia
 - 3) Collaborative assignments involving students of different backgrounds
 - c. Use of Learning Media
Teachers frequently use digital videos, local cultural examples, and national integration themes to reinforce the importance of religious harmony.
3. School Programs Supporting Religious Moderation
- Beyond classroom learning, schools implement several programs aligned with moderation objectives:
- a. Extracurricular Activities
Extracurricular programs—such as Islamic study clubs, community-service groups, and interfaith awareness workshops—provide platforms for students to practice inclusive behavior.
 - b. School Culture and Climate
School leadership actively cultivates a culture of respect by:
 - 1) Encouraging greetings across religion and culture
 - 2) Promoting shared celebration of national holidays
 - 3) Enforcing rules against hate speech or intolerance
 - 4) These practices create an environment conducive to internalizing moderation values.
4. Challenges in Policy Implementation
- Despite positive efforts, several obstacles were identified:
- a. Limited Teacher Training
Some teachers reported insufficient training on religious moderation content or effective methodologies for teaching it.
 - b. Variations in School Support
Not all school leaders prioritize religious moderation equally; some schools have strong programs, while others rely heavily on individual teacher initiative.
 - c. Student Background Diversity
Differences in family upbringing and social media exposure influence how students receive and interpret moderation values.
5. Impact on Students' Attitudes
- Interviews and observations show notable positive effects:
- a. Increased Tolerance and Mutual Respect
Students demonstrate improved attitudes toward peers of different faiths and

ethnic backgrounds.

b. Critical Thinking in Religious Issues

Learners show greater ability to differentiate between contextual and extreme interpretations of religious teachings.

c. Strengthened National Identity

Students express stronger commitment to Pancasila values, unity, and peaceful coexistence.

Discussion

The Islamic Religious Education Policy (PAI) in Indonesia has an important role in shaping the character of students who are religious and moderate. The legal basis that regulates the implementation of religious education is listed in Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System and Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education. The two regulations emphasized that religious education aims not only to foster faith and piety, but also to form an attitude of mutual respect between religious people. Thus, the PAI policy has spiritual and social dimensions that are interrelated in building a peaceful and civilized society.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia since 2019 has strengthened the direction of education policy through the Religious Moderation Roadmap 2019–2024, which is the basis for the implementation of religious education based on moderation values. The concept of religious moderation emphasizes balance, tolerance, and respect for differences. In the context of education, these values are integrated into the curriculum and learning activities so that students understand Islam in *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. In line with that, the Merdeka Learning policy from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology provides space for teachers to develop learning materials and projects that instill national values and moderation in daily life.

The implementation of PAI's policy in strengthening religious moderation in public schools has shown a number of positive achievements. Based on research conducted by (Noviani & Yanuarti, 2023), the implementation of moderation values in the Independent Curriculum opens up opportunities for teachers to instill a contextual understanding of religion. Teachers not only play the role of transmitters of teachings, but also as facilitators of interreligious dialogue and the preservation of a culture of tolerance in schools. The same thing is affirmed by Ikhwan et al., (2023) in their research

which shows that Islamic education has a strategic responsibility in fostering a generation that respects diversity and is able to reject extremism. These two studies confirm that PAI policies can be an effective means of strengthening religious moderation if supported by pedagogical innovation and adequate teacher understanding.

However, the implementation of the policy in the field still faces a number of obstacles. Some teachers have not fully understood the concept of religious moderation in its entirety, so its implementation is still limited to ceremonial activities such as the commemoration of religious holidays. According to research by Habibie et al., (2021), there are still some people and educators who consider religious moderation as an effort to secularize or weaken Islamic values, so resistance to this policy sometimes arises. In addition, social environmental factors and lack of support from school management are also obstacles in creating a moderate culture in public schools.

On the other hand, there are good practices that show the effectiveness of religious moderation policies when implemented comprehensively. A case study conducted at MAN 1 Jembrana, Bali, for example, shows how PAI learning that is open to diversity can create a culture tolerance through activities such as interfaith dialogue, social collaboration between students, and the preservation of local culture. This kind of learning model has proven to be effective in instilling contextual Islamic values and fostering mutual respect between religious communities (Dewi Anggraeni, 2023). These findings reinforce the view that good policy should be followed by creative, real-life-oriented learning practices.

Thus, the success of the PAI policy in strengthening religious moderation is highly dependent on three main aspects: teacher understanding, support of educational institutions, and community participation. PAI teachers need to be given continuous training to be able to internalize the values of moderation in the learning process. Schools also need to create an inclusive environment that is open to differences. In addition, the role of parents and the surrounding community is important to strengthen the values of tolerance outside the classroom. The Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education and Culture as policy makers need to continue to evaluate the implementation of the religious moderation program so that the results can be measured objectively.

From the results of various research and field practices, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education policy has great potential in shaping the character of moderate and tolerant students. However, this potential can only be realized if policies are implemented consistently and accompanied by synergy between teachers, schools,

and the government. Therefore, religious moderation is not only a policy slogan, but must be a lively educational movement in all teaching and learning activities in public schools.

From the results of the discussion, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) policy in Indonesia has been clearly directed to strengthen religious moderation through legal frameworks, national policies, and curriculum reforms. The government's efforts, especially through the 2019-2024 Religious Moderation Roadmap and the Merdeka Learning program, show seriousness in instilling the values of tolerance, balance, and respect for diversity in religious learning.

The implementation of this policy in public schools shows positive results when PAI teachers are able to develop a contextual, dialogical, and inclusive learning approach. Research from (Noviani & Yanuarti, 2023) and (Ikhwan et al., 2023) reinforces the view that PAI can be an effective means to build student moderate attitudes if implemented with innovation and supported by school management that is open to diversity. An example of practice at MAN 1 Jembrana, Bali, proves that interfaith activities and social collaboration in the school environment are able to strengthen tolerance and solidarity between religious communities.

However, the implementation of this policy still faces various challenges, such as the uneven understanding of teachers about the concept of religious moderation, public resistance to the term "moderation", and weak support for the school social environment. For this reason, it is necessary to improve teacher competence, strengthen inclusive school culture, and monitor policies on an ongoing basis so that PAI policies can truly realize the goals of religious moderation in the world of education.

Conclusion

The Islamic Religious Education Policy (PAI) has a strategic role in building the character of students who are moderate, tolerant, and nationally insightful. Through various national regulations, such as Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education, and the Religious Moderation Roadmap 2019–2024 from the Ministry of Religion, the government has affirmed the direction of religious education policies oriented towards balance, tolerance, and respect for diversity. The integration of these moderation values is further strengthened by the Merdeka Belajar policy which provides flexibility for PAI teachers to develop character-based learning and human values.

The results of the analysis show that the implementation of the PAI policy in strengthening religious moderation in public schools has been positive, especially in the context of curriculum development and learning activities that emphasize tolerance and respect for differences. Research from (Noviani & Yanuarti, 2023) and (Ikhwan et al., 2023) shows that Islamic education can be an effective means of instilling moderation values if implemented creatively, contextually, and participalologically. In addition, good practices in various schools such as MAN 1 Jembrana, Bali, show that student involvement in interfaith and social activities is able to strengthen tolerance and solidarity between students.

However, implementation challenges are still found, including teachers' lack of understanding of the concept of religious moderation, resistance of some people to moderation policies, and weak institutional support in building an inclusive school culture. Therefore, the success of PAI policies does not only depend on formal regulations, but also on the commitment of all stakeholders: teachers, schools, the community, and the government.

By strengthening teacher training, conducting continuous policy evaluations, and building synergy between the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education and Culture, Islamic Religious Education has great potential to become the main motor in realizing a religious and moderate Indonesian society. PAI is not only an instrument of dogmatic teaching, but also a vehicle for the formation of the nation's character that respects differences and upholds universal human values. Thus, PAI's policy oriented towards religious moderation can be a strong foundation for the realization of peaceful, just, and civilized national education.

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