

Transformation of Religious Moderation Values in a Multicultural Society: A Study of Islamic Education Approaches in North Bengkulu Regency

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Abstract

Background: Indonesia, as a multicultural country, faces challenges of intolerance and radicalism that threaten social stability. North Bengkulu Regency, as a multicultural area, requires religious moderation strengthening strategies to maintain harmony among religious communities.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative approach using case study method. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies on the religious moderation strengthening program. Program evaluation utilized Ralph W. Tyler's model emphasizing planning, implementation, and outcomes aspects.

Results: The program was implemented through the establishment of the Interfaith Religious Representatives Forum (FPUB), interfaith dialogue, communal work across religious groups, harmony camps, harmony parades, and moderation training. Five main supporting factors were identified: active roles of formal institutions, clear planning documents, open social conditions, involvement of religious leaders, and systematic program logic. Inhibiting factors included limited budget, restricted community understanding, and minimal competent human resources.

Conclusion: The religious moderation strengthening program in North Bengkulu Regency successfully internalized moderate Islamic values through participatory community-based education approaches. The program implementation demonstrated strong alignment with Islamic education principles, particularly wasathiyah values, tolerance, and social justice in multicultural society contexts.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Islamic Education; FPUB; Program Evaluation; Multicultural Society;

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multicultural country with a diversity of religions, cultures, ethnicities, and languages. While this diversity is a national asset, it can also trigger social conflict if not managed properly. The phenomena of intolerance, religiously based hate speech, and radicalism pose serious challenges to maintaining social stability and national integration. Data from the Setara Institute in 2022 recorded at least 171 incidents of violations of freedom of religion and belief in Indonesia, most of which occurred due to the weak strengthening of values of tolerance and moderate religious attitudes. Therefore, religious moderation is a strategic approach to strengthening social cohesion and creating a harmonious religious life in a pluralistic society.

Religious moderation is a middle ground that upholds the principles of justice, balance, tolerance, and the rejection of religious violence. This concept is not only normative in religious teachings but also highly relevant in the practice of social life, particularly in building a peaceful and inclusive society. From an Islamic perspective, the principle of moderation (*wasathiyah*) is affirmed in Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 143 of the Quran, which refers to Muslims as *ummatan wasathan*, a just and balanced community. Several previous studies have discussed strengthening religious moderation in various contexts. Hidayat (2020) emphasized the importance of inclusive religious education in instilling moderate attitudes from an early age, particularly in schools.

Latifah & Rohman (2021) explained that government programs such as teacher training, interfaith dialogue, and tolerance campaigns through social media are crucial in supporting moderate religious attitudes. However, these studies tend to focus on urban areas and formal educational institutions, while the context of rural areas or districts with distinct sociocultural characteristics has rarely been studied in depth.

This gap underlies the scientific novelty of this article. This article specifically examines the implementation of a program to strengthen religious moderation in North Bengkulu Regency—a multicultural region inhabited by various ethnicities and religions. This study uses an Islamic education perspective to assess how the values of moderation are instilled and internalized through a community-based socio-religious approach. By combining educational and social studies approaches, this article offers an alternative model for strengthening religious moderation in non-urban areas.

The questions addressed in this article are: (1) How is the program for strengthening religious moderation implemented in North Bengkulu Regency? and (2) To what extent does the program align with the principles of Islamic education? This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach, using data collection techniques through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted inductively to explore the process, dynamics, and effectiveness of the program in shaping moderate religious attitudes.

The purpose of this study is to describe the implementation of the program for strengthening religious moderation in North Bengkulu Regency and to analyze its relevance from an Islamic education perspective. It is hoped that the results of this study will provide theoretical contributions to the development of community-based Islamic

education and offer a practical model for implementing religious moderation in multicultural rural areas.

METODE

This research is a qualitative study using a case study approach. This approach was chosen because it aimed to examine in-depth the implementation of a program to strengthen religious moderation attitudes in the specific context of the multicultural society in North Bengkulu Regency. According to Yin (2018), a case study is an appropriate research strategy for answering "how" and "why" questions related to contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. The research was conducted in North Bengkulu Regency, Bengkulu Province, which was selected based on the consideration that the region is multicultural and inhabited by various ethnicities and religions, making it relevant for studying the implementation of a religious moderation program.

Data collection in this study was conducted through three main techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation study. In-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner with key informants including members of the Religious Representative Forum (FPUB), religious leaders from various religious communities, community leaders and traditional leaders, representatives of the village government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and program participants from the general public. Participatory observation was conducted on various program activities, such as interfaith dialogue, interfaith community service, religious moderation training, religious holiday celebrations, harmony camps, and harmony parades. Additionally, a documentation study was conducted to collect secondary data in the form of program planning documents, FPUB activity implementation reports, village regulations related to interfaith harmony, annual activity schedules, participant lists, and photos and documentation of activities.

Data analysis was conducted inductively following the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three main components. First, data reduction, which includes selecting and focusing data from interviews, observations, and documentation, and simplifying the data into field notes, interview transcripts, and document abstractions. Second, data presentation, which involves organizing data into matrices, charts, and networks, aligning with the research focus on program implementation and its alignment with Islamic educational principles. Third, conclusions were drawn through iterative interpretation to identify key patterns and themes, and conclusions were verified through triangulation of sources and techniques. To ensure data validity, this study employed triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checking and peer debriefing.

The evaluation of the religious moderation strengthening program used the Ralph W. Tyler Evaluation Model (1949). This model was chosen because it is goal-oriented and emphasizes three main aspects. The planning aspect includes analyzing the clarity of program objectives, the availability of planning documents, and stakeholder involvement. The implementation aspect covers the implementation of activities according to plan, the role of facilitators and coordination between parties, and community participation in

activities. The outcomes aspect includes changes in community attitudes and behavior, increased tolerance and harmony between religious communities, and program sustainability. The conceptual framework of this study integrates Islamic educational theory regarding the concepts of *wasathiyah* and *tasamuh*, Tyler's program evaluation theory, and social change theory to analyze factors supporting and inhibiting program implementation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Program to Strengthen Religious Moderation in the Community of North Bengkulu Regency

Some of these activities include: regular interfaith dialogues to discuss social issues, community service activities involving all residents regardless of religious background, and religious moderation training facilitated by religious leaders and academics. Furthermore, religious holiday celebrations are often conducted inclusively, inviting participation from adherents of other faiths as a form of appreciation for cultural and belief diversity.

These activities not only strengthen interfaith relations but also serve as educational tools for instilling tolerant and peaceful religious values. The implementation of this program demonstrates that religious moderation is not merely a normative concept but can be realized in concrete social practices relevant to the needs of multicultural rural communities.

Through a participatory and community-based approach, this program has demonstrated its effectiveness in creating social harmony and strengthening cohesion between religious groups. This also indicates that moderate religious education can be implemented not only in formal settings such as schools, but also in the social dynamics of communities through collective and interactive activities.

This program encompasses various strategic activities aimed at comprehensively instilling the values of religious moderation. One key initiative is the establishment of the Religious Representative Forum (FPUB), a forum comprising representatives from all religions in North Bengkulu Regency. FPUB serves as a forum for interfaith communication, dialogue, and deliberation in resolving social issues and facilitating joint religious activities. The existence of this forum reflects the principles of *tawassuth* (middle way) and *ta'adul* (justice) as taught in the concept of religious moderation. From the perspective of Ralph W. Tyler's (1949) program evaluation, the success of this program can be assessed through three main indicators: planning, implementation, and results. The establishment of FPUB is a key indicator of success in the planning and implementation aspects of the program to strengthen religious moderation at the village level.

Furthermore, this program also includes activities to promote the values of religious moderation through religious lectures, regular religious studies, and meetings between religious and community leaders. The goal of these activities is to build collective public awareness of the importance of living in harmony, respecting each other, and appreciating differences as part of the nation's social and spiritual richness. Another activity is the Harmony Camp, which involves junior and senior high school

students from various religious backgrounds. Through this activity, participants are invited to interact in a collaborative atmosphere, engage in discussions, and participate in training that internalizes the values of tolerance and cooperation among the younger generation.

In addition, the Harmony Parade is held, a joint interfaith parade designed to concretely express the spirit of unity in diversity. This activity not only symbolizes social harmony but also strengthens a sense of togetherness and solidarity among adherents of different religions and encourages the imitation of role models who demonstrate tolerance and respect for differences. Through consistent role models from community and religious leaders, the values of religious moderation can be more deeply internalized within society.

In addition to the successful implementation of the program, the evaluation of the program to strengthen religious moderation in North Bengkulu Regency also showed the existence of supporting and inhibiting factors that influenced the implementation process.

a. Supporting Factors

- 1) The active role of the village government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which are the primary initiators and facilitators of various program activities. This aligns with the theory of institutional roles in social development, which emphasizes the importance of formal institutions as drivers, facilitators, and catalysts for social change in society.
- 2) The existence of clear planning documents and performance indicators, such as annual activity schedules, participant lists, and implementation reports. This demonstrates that the program is implemented in a structured, organized manner, and its success can be measured. This approach aligns with the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), which emphasizes the importance of systematic and evaluable program logic.
- 3) The social conditions of a pluralistic and open society, where residents are accustomed to living side by side harmoniously across religions and demonstrate a high level of tolerance. This environment facilitates the acceptance and implementation of religious moderation programs in a more inclusive and effective manner.
- 4) The active involvement of religious and community leaders, who serve as role models and driving agents in building collective awareness of the importance of interfaith harmony. This involvement reflects the importance of a community-based approach in supporting the success of social programs.

The four factors above reflect the program evaluation principles proposed by Ralph W. Tyler (1949), which state that measuring a program's success must be based on three main aspects: planning, implementation, and results. The clarity of indicators and adequate documentation demonstrate that the religious moderation program in North Bengkulu Regency has a strong foundation in planning and implementation and can be evaluated objectively.

b. Indicators of Success of the Religious Moderation Program

For the implementation of the religious moderation strengthening program to be effective, its success indicators must meet the SMART principles: specific, measurable,

relevant, achievable, and time-bound. In this context, supporting indicators for the implementation of the religious moderation program in North Bengkulu Regency include:

- 1) Active participation of interfaith communities in various collective activities such as religious lectures, tolerance training, and interfaith social work.
- 2) Changes in community attitudes and behavior, reflected in increased tolerance, openness, and mutual respect for differences in beliefs.
- 3) The presence and involvement of religious and community leaders in consistently supporting the program through outreach activities, education, and moral and social role models.
- 4) Increasing the frequency and quality of interfaith dialogue, both in the form of interfaith gathering forums and community meetings.
- 5) Consistent program implementation in accordance with the annual schedule and strategic objectives formulated in the activity plan.
- 6) Support for local regulations and policies, such as Village Regulations (Perdes) or village head circulars that explicitly support the values of religious tolerance and moderation.
- 7) Regular evaluation and documentation of activities, which not only record the implementation process but also serve as material for reflection and future program improvements.

c. Inhibitors of the Religious Moderation Program in North Bengkulu Regency

Although the program to strengthen religious moderation in North Bengkulu Regency has shown positive results, several obstacles hinder its implementation. These obstacles include:

- 1) **Budgetary Limitations** To date, most religious moderation activities have been funded solely through village budgets or community contributions. This situation makes program implementation incidental, unplanned, and less sustainable. Referring to the systems theory proposed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), a program is a unified system consisting of various interdependent components. If one component, in this case funding, is not functioning optimally, the entire program system can experience disruption or become ineffective.
- 2) **Lack of Public Understanding of the Concept of Religious Moderation.** Some members of the public, particularly those who have not yet participated in direct outreach, still have a limited understanding of the concept of religious moderation. As a result, this program is often viewed as merely ceremonial, even arousing suspicion among certain groups.
Based on Kurt Lewin's theory of social change (1951), every social change tends to face resistance, especially from communities that do not fully understand the values of the change. In this context, public ignorance of the essence of religious moderation is a serious obstacle to building support and active participation from residents.
- 3) **Limited Competent Human Resources (HR)** Program implementation is also hampered by the limited number of facilitators who comprehensively understand the principles of religious moderation and are able to convey them in contextual language that is easily understood by village communities. Referring to the policy implementation

theory of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), the success of a program is largely determined by the field implementers. In this regard, the lack of professional and trained human resources to effectively convey the message of religious moderation is a weakness in program implementation.

Program for Strengthening Religious Moderation from an Islamic Education Perspective

Religious moderation is a fundamental value believed to foster well-being in a pluralistic society like Indonesia. In this context, a moderate, just, and balanced mental attitude is the primary principle in managing diversity. These values are not exclusive to Islam but are also an integral part of the theological teachings of nearly all religions and civilizations worldwide.

Theological approaches across various religions demonstrate that all religious teachings encourage their adherents to develop values such as justice, tolerance, non-violence, and respect for local wisdom. No religion in the world teaches extreme behavior, persecution (dhalim), or violence as part of the expression of faith. In Islam, moderation (wasathiyah) is a core teaching that encourages followers to always uphold truth and justice, regardless of religious background, ethnicity, or social class. In fact, in some cases, Muslims are commanded to defend justice even against those of differing beliefs, as long as it serves the purpose of upholding universal truth. This aligns with Allah's word in Surah Al-Māidah, verse 8, which states: "O you who believe! Be upright for Allah, bearing witness with justice. And let not your hatred for a people incite you to injustice. Be just, for that is closer to piety." (Surah Al-Māidah, verse 8)

This verse emphasizes that justice is a principle that must not be compromised, even in tense social relations. This is the ethical basis of religious moderation, which is highly relevant to be developed in Islamic education practices, particularly in grassroots communities.

From an Islamic education perspective, programs to strengthen attitudes of moderation must be implemented holistically and contextually. This strengthening involves a process of socializing wasathiyah values that are not merely conveyed textually but also transformed through cultural and pedagogical approaches appropriate to the realities of rural communities. Therefore, the presence of a mentor or facilitator who can explain the concept of moderation in a simple, communicative, and down-to-earth manner is crucial for the message of moderation to be understood and effectively internalized by the public.

In addition to the command to act justly, Islam also strictly prohibits acts of vilifying, insulting, or cursing the deities revered by followers of other religions. This prohibition is intended to prevent the emergence of offense and retaliatory actions that could worsen interfaith relations. This is emphasized in the words of Allah SWT in Surah Al-An'am, verse 108:

"And insult not those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah excessively without knowledge..." (Q.S. Al-An'am: 108)

Islam also provides space for the realization of tolerance in religious life, by providing recommendations to do good and act fairly towards people of other religions, as long as they maintain two main principles: not fighting Muslims because of religion, and not

expelling Muslims from the country where they legally live. This principle is confirmed in Surah Al-Mumtahanah verse 8, which states that:

"Allah does not forbid you to do good and be fair to those who do not fight you because of religion and do not (nor) expel you from your land. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly." (Q.S. Al-Mumtahanah: 8)

The noble attitude of religious moderation in Islam is a universal command to uphold truth and justice, anytime, anywhere, and towards anyone, including followers of different religions. Upholding justice is not only in the interests of Muslims, but is also a universal principle for creating social harmony across religions.

The command to act fairly in general is contained in Surah Al-Mā'idah verse 8, as previously explained. These values were further reinforced in the Medina Charter, drafted by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) during his migration to Medina. The Charter served as the foundation for a multicultural and multireligious society within a single city-state.

The Medina Charter contained provisions reflecting the principles of religious moderation, including the obligation to live in peace, uphold justice, and maintain equal rights and obligations among citizens, regardless of religious background. This meant that religious differences were not a barrier to harmonious coexistence within society.

CONCLUSION

The program to strengthen religious moderation in North Bengkulu Regency is demonstrated through various activities oriented towards strengthening the values of interfaith harmony. Some of the programs implemented include the establishment of the Interfaith Representative Forum (FPUB), the socialization of moderation values, harmony camps, harmony parades, interfaith prayer gatherings, and interfaith funeral services. These programs represent the implementation of the main principles of religious moderation, such as national commitment, rejection of violence (non-violence), respect for local culture, and strengthening interfaith tolerance.

From an Islamic education perspective, the religious moderation program in North Bengkulu Regency strongly aligns with Islamic teachings. Values such as tolerance, human brotherhood, and respect for differences are integral parts of Islamic education, derived from the Quran and Hadith. The form of socialization of the values of religious moderation, such as through educational activities (harmony camps, harmony parades, joint prayers), reflects the practice of contextual Islamic education that builds collective awareness in maintaining harmony and social harmony in a pluralistic society.

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