

Religious Education in Indonesia: Between Tolerance and Ideological Contestation

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Abstract: This study focuses on how religious education contributes to build tolerance behavior and prevent or minimize ideological contestation. Therefore, this study answers a research question, namely; What are the relevant models of religious education to promote *religious tolerance*?. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through documentation and interviews with informants from several selected schools and madrasas in West Lombok-West Nusa Tenggara. Data collection was also strengthened with Focus Group Discussion. Then, the data analysis used was a thematic analysis. The study found that; The relevant model of religious education to build ideal tolerance is a model of religious education characterized by components (goals, teachers, content and methods) support inclusive values and behaviors. Without inclusivism in each of these components, religious education will lead to ideological contestation, a contest of truth based on the ideology believed by each adherent of a certain belief or religion.

Keywords: Religious Education, Tolerance and Ideological contestation

Abstrak: Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana pendidikan agama berkontribusi dalam membangun perilaku toleransi dan mencegah atau meminimalkan kontestasi ideologis. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menjawab pertanyaan penelitian, yaitu; Apa model pendidikan agama yang relevan untuk mempromosikan toleransi beragama? Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui dokumentasi dan wawancara dengan informan dari beberapa sekolah dan madrasah terpilih di Lombok Barat, Nusa Tenggara Barat. Pengumpulan data juga diperkuat dengan *Focus Group Discussion*. Analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis tematik. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa; Model pendidikan agama yang relevan untuk membangun toleransi ideal adalah model pendidikan agama yang ditandai dengan komponen-komponen (tujuan, guru, konten dan metode) yang mendukung nilai-nilai dan perilaku inklusif. Tanpa inklusivisme dalam setiap komponen ini, pendidikan agama akan



mengarah pada kontestasi ideologis, yaitu perebutan kebenaran berdasarkan ideologi yang diyakini oleh masing-masing penganut agama tertentu.

Kata Kunci: Pendidikan Agama, Toleransi, Kontestasi Ideologis

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Introduction

There is an interesting story about interreligious tolerance among elementary school students in Indonesia, precisely in Jombang, East Java. According to the report of M. Syafi'i and Khairina (2019), students from Petra Christian Elementary School invited students from Islamic Schools to break their fast. They also prepare water for ablution and a place to perform Maghrib prayers. This fact can be an example for thousands of schools in Indonesia, moreover, Indonesia is a country known as a plural country, especially in terms of religion. The students from the two schools of different religions are not only taught tolerance by reading books but also through hands-on practice in empirical reality. Regretfully, this fact only applies to a small number of schools because thousands of Indonesian schools are still enshrouded in extreme fanaticism and truth-claim, which breeds intolerance.

When intolerance occurs, one of the next criticisms is addressed to the "world of education", especially "religious education". What is wrong with religious education in Indonesia?, isn't religious education full of norms or values that guide tolerant behavior?. At first glance, there is no problem with religious education in Indonesia, because the government fully supports religious education, both in *public* and *private schools*. This support can be seen in Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system. Article 30, paragraphs 1 and 2 stated: "(1) Religious education is organized by the Government and/or community groups of religious believers, in accordance

with laws and regulations. (2) Religious education functions to prepare students to become members of society who understand and practice the values of their religious teachings and/or become experts in religious science". Then, Article 7, paragraphs 1 and 2 stated that; The curriculum at every level of education (from elementary education to higher education) is required to contain religious education.

Problems arise when linking expectations with reality, where religious education is usually on two different sides, namely, religious education as a medium for sowing the seeds of tolerance on the one hand and religious education as a medium for ideological contestation (such as seeking followers, strengthening religious egoism) on the other hand. According to Muslehuiddin (2021), ideological contestation is often found in educational institutions in the form of low, regular, or high contestation, including in educational institutions on Lombok Island.

The process of religious education determines whether religious education is used as a medium to sow the seeds of tolerance or used as a medium for ideological contestation. This means that the process of religious education determines the result or outcome of the religious education. Here, the process relates to the model of religious education used. Some experts describe several models of religious education. The model consists of the way, the content, the teachers, the students and its philosophical foundation. This means that the religious education model is not only concerned with "how to teach" but also what is taught, what is its purpose, and how to teach students about religious content.

Furthermore, this research was carried out in several schools in West Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara with a focus on: what is the educational model that constructs tolerance and intolerance such as ideological contestation.?

Research Question

There is a research question that guides this research, namely: what is the

relevant model of religious education to construct religious tolerance to avoid or minimize ideological contestation?

Purpose

This study aims to describe and analyze relevant religious education models to construct religious tolerance and avoid or minimize ideological contestation.

Theoretical Framework

Grimmit as quoted by Baidhawiy mentions three models of religious education, namely: "*Learn in*" or *leraning into*, "*learning about*" or *learning about* and "*Learn from*" or *learning from* (Baidhawiy, 2017). Then Hermans as quoted by Fitriani (2023) elaborated three models of religious education, namely: *mono-religious*, *multi-religious* and *inter-religious education*. According to Hermans (2003), *mono-religious education* focus on learning on one religion. *multi-religious education* focus on acknowledging and responding to plural reality. While *inter-religious model* aims to provide understanding to students to realize dialogue between different religions (Hermans, 2003). In addition, Jack Seymour as quoted by Asrori (2016) classifying the religious education model into two parts, namely; *in the wall model* and *at the wall model*. Furthermore, Tabita K. Christiana added the two models with *beyond the wall model* (Asrori, 2016).

Then, Sterkens—as quoted by Kienstra et al. (2019) stated that there are four important concepts for education that support openness and tolerance, namely; (1) an educational model that teaches a person to interpret and criticize one's own religion which can be called "*auto-interpretation of one's religious tradition*"; (Kienstra et al., 2019) (2) an educational model that teaches a person to interpret or criticize other religions from the perspective of their own religion which can be called "*auto-interpretation of foreign religious traditions*" (Kienstra et al., 2019); (3) an educational model that teaches a person to interpret or criticize their own religion from the perspective of other religions called "*allo-interpretation of one's tradition*" (Kienstra et al., 2019) and (4)

An educational model that teaches a person to interpret or criticize the religion of others with the perspective of another religion called "*allo-interpretation of foreign traditions*" (Kienstra et al., 2019). All of these educational models contribute to determining student behavior.

Methods

This research was conducted in a number of schools and madrasas in West Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. The researchers use a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with informants consisting of 10 religious education teachers from a number of selected schools with the following terms: teacher 1 (G1) teacher 2 (G2); teacher 3 (G3); teacher 4 (G4); teacher 5 (G5); teacher 6 (G6); teacher 7 (G7); teacher 8 (G8); teacher 9 (G9); teacher 10 (G10). The results of the interviews were presented with indirect quotes, In addition, documentation and non-participants observation were also used to strengthen the interview data. For the final stage in data collection, the researchers conducted *focus group discussion*. For data validity, researchers use data triangulation by collecting data to the stage of "data saturation". After the data were collected, the researchers analyzed the data with the *thematic analysis* by Clarke and Braun (2013).

Discussion

Here, tolerance is understood as respect, acceptance or appreciation of differences (Unesco, 1995). Meanwhile, the ideological contestation is a battle of ideas or beliefs between different groups caused by exclusive viewpoints (Muslehuddin, 2021). This exclusivity often leads to intolerance (Saparudin, 2018).

Furthermore, the Religious Education Model that supports tolerance and minimizes ideological contestation will be elaborated in more detail. This elaboration refers to Robert R. Newton (1981), who said that each learning

model has implications for goals, principles, teachers, students, curriculum, environment, evaluation and advocacy. Due to the limitations of researchers, in this article, the model is limited to subject/material, objectives, methods and teachers only.

Table 1: Some Components of Religious Education to supporting Tolerance and avoiding ideological contestation

No	Components of the Religious Education	Explanation
1	Goals of Religious Education	Goals of Religious Education that supports tolerance
2	Religious Education Content	Religious Education content that supports tolerance
3	Religious Education Teacher	Religious Education Teachers who support tolerance
4	Religious Education Methods	Religious Education Methods that Support Tolerance

First, in terms of goals, religious education that supports tolerance and minimizes ideological contestation can be pursued by formulating inclusive educational goals and avoiding learning goals that focus on "*truth claim*". According to Basri (2011) Truth claim is a serious problem that needs to be overcome to realize dialogue, including dialogue between religions. Actually *truth claim* is not entirely wrong, because every religious believer has the right to declare that his/her religious teachings are the right teachings. But the *truth claim* needs to be followed by a tolerant attitude, namely realizing and allowing followers of other religions to declare the truth according to their teachings. Excessive truth claims will endanger harmony among multi-religious or multicultural communities. Usually, this excessive truth claim is caused by an educational model that focuses on one religion only.

From the point of view of the religious education model, the purpose of religious education that teaches one religion without associating it with another religion is called "*in the wall model*". This is based on the views of a number of experts who mentioned *in the wall model* focus on one religion only (Asrori, 2016; Nuryatno, 2016), because building a bridge is better than building a wall (McCowan, 2017). Even, G1, G2 and G3 expressed the

urgency of a "bridge" to realize peace and harmony. Here the bridge means all positive efforts to find common ground in the midst of diversity (G4).

In another perspective, it can also be called the mono-religious model. This model is usually found in educational institutions affiliated with a particular religion. According to Muslehuddin (2021) and Saparudin (2018), educational institutions based on a certain religion and a certain school (*mazhab*) tend to teach a certain religion and a certain school. This can be seen from many Islamic-based educational institutions with the Shafi'i school teaches the Shafi'i school only (observation and documentation).

A question arises; Is a religious education forbidden to teach the truth from the perspective of a particular religion? It is not wrong as long as it is followed by an inclusive and tolerant attitude by adding the first model above with *multi-religious education* and *interreligious education*. This is relevant to what Boutte stated, as quoted by Lee (2010) and Fitriani (2016) that the viewpoint "*my perspective is right and only one*" is changed to "*my perspective is one of many*". This means that religious education aims to produce tolerant behavior through inclusive understanding.

Second, religious education content that supports tolerance and avoids ideological contestation. Religious education content is an important part of the religious education model. Referring to the religious education model, religious education materials that support tolerance and prevent ideological contestation are content that contains tolerant values and practices. When viewed from perspective *mono-religious content*, the content taught focuses on one religion only, but dimensions that teach tolerant and moderate attitudes to support peace and harmony are emphasized in the learning process. It is based on the main mission of religion, it is to spread peace and harmony. In addition, religious moderation aims to realize love of peace among people by avoiding radical attitudes (Naamy & Hariyanto, 2021) There are also universal values as a meeting point between one religion and another, such as justice, honesty, tolerance, harmony and so on.

What about *multi- and inter-religious content*. These two models are relevant to building tolerance, but their implementation is difficult in elementary or secondary schools in Indonesia. This model can usually be applied in a number of universities through certain courses such as; comparison of *madhhab* or comparison of religion. This comparative religion course (for example) teaches students to understand the plurality of religions (Amaliyah, 2017) as *Sunnatullah*. An interesting concept to consider is religious education for all religions (Tri Utami, Shimizu, & Kusakabe, 2021), but the model is also still difficult to apply in Indonesia. Referring to Yusuf (2020), it is caused by the dominant model of religious education in Indonesia is *mono-religious education* (Yusuf, 2020) or *in the wall model*. Thus, *mono-religious content* remain an option with an emphasis on common values to build and promote harmony in diversity (G6, G7, G8). In essence, the concept of tolerance needs to be applied in a multicultural society (Muhayat & Naamy, 2023), including through the process of religious education.

In relation to the illustration above, it is interesting to quote Moore (2007) who mentions and differs the term *inclusive sectarian* and *exclusive sectarian*. According to Moore (2007), inclusive sectarianism is defined as an educational process that focuses on certain theological views and the diversity of other worldviews through a non-sectarian perspective. He gave an example of a school that divides its department into two parts with different materials to respond to the existing reality, namely; "*religious education*" which specifically teaches certain doctrines, history or theology and "*religious study*" which provides opportunities for students to know or understand other perspectives. In contrast to *inclusive sectarian*, *exclusive sectarian* focus on one particular religious tradition only.

Third, Religious Education Teacher. Religious education teachers who support tolerance are teachers whose moderate insights. This insight is based on the values of moderation consisting of *tawazun* (balanced), *i'tidal* (straight and firm), *tasamub* (tolerance), *musawah* (egalitarian), *shura* (deliberation), *isblah*

(reform), *aulawiyah* (prioritizing priorities), *tathawwur wa ibtikar* (dynamic and innovative) (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). One of the moderation dimensions that needs to be transferred (as a value and a behavior) is tolerance values and behavior. The manifestation of moderate teachers can be seen from how teachers teach and practice tolerance in schools, if tolerance is only focused on internal tolerance (internal organization, internal sect or internal religion) the tolerance will be dominated by internal tolerance. Internal tolerance is accompanied by external tolerance to reduce or even avoid ideological contests. To build internal tolerance, for example, the story of Imam Shafii's practice of tolerance to Abu Hanifah should be used as a lesson learned. Although they had many differences, Imam Shafii had great respect for Imam Abu Hanifah. In fact, he (Imam Shafii) once prayed *shubuh* without *qunut* to honor Imam Abu Hanifah whose view that *qunut* is not a *sunnah* in the *shubuh* prayer (NU Online, 2017). This means that teachers are role models who exemplify the value and behavior of tolerance before teaching students (G1, G9, G10).

Fourth, a method of religious education that supports tolerance and avoids ideological contestation. Among the methods offered to support religious tolerance and avoid ideological contestation is to distinguish between *devotional lens* and *academic lens*. According to Moore (2007), academic lenses are relevant for studying religion internally (*within*) or between (*between*) religion (Moore, 2007). In its application, sociological considerations where the educational institution is located need to be carried out. This is related to the acceptance or rejection of a method in its application. This is because not all methods are good for all situations and conditions (G5, G6, G8). Besides, to achieve tolerant education, it is also necessary to take into account the four key ideas of Sterken, as cited by Kienstra et al. (2019). These ideas can be used by educators as an alternative approach to religious education that promotes tolerance and reduces meaningless ideological debate. Systemic preparation is necessary for the use of the aforementioned alternative method.

Conclusion

This study concludes a model of religious education to promote religious tolerance and minimize ideological contestation. It is a religious education model with all components (goals, teachers, content and methods) support inclusive values and behaviors. Without inclusivism in each of these components, religious education will leads to ideological contestation, a contest of truth based on the ideology believed by each adherent of a certain belief or religion. A number of religious education models proposed by experts (in, at and beyond the wall or learning religion, learning about religion and learning from religion or mono-multi and interreligious education model) need to be applied integratively with full of consideration.

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