

Unveiling the Practice of Religious Moderation: A case at a High School in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The diverse background of Indonesian makes religious moderation and tolerance are the essential aspects in keeping the unity of the nation. This study aims to describe the practice of religious moderation in a public school in Pulang Pisau Regency, Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. This was a case study at SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau. The main informant was the school principal. A Semi-structured in-depth interview and documentation were conducted to help the researchers collected the data. Data analysis was carried out through data transcription, data reading, data reduction, data presentation and interpretation, and drawing conclusions. The results of this study indicate that the practice of religious moderation has actually existed long before the government proclaimed the term 'religious moderation'. The principal has carried out several programs to implement this religious moderation. The first, the school has allowed the prayer recital at the flag assembly were led by the representative of each religious believers in turn every Monday morning. Second, the school has set the immersive religion activities for every religious believers in the school by seizing the moment of *Pesantren Ramadhan* week. Thus, this was not an obligatory for the Muslims only to practice religious activities, but also Hindu and Christian students and teachers could also set their own religious activities during the week. In addition, students and teachers were very tolerant to one another. This study provides suggestions for further research in order to be able to observe schools from various levels and formal/non-formal to investigate the practice of religious moderation in the educational environment.

Keywords : religious moderation, tolerance, school, education

I. Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralistic country with a large population consisting of various cultures, races, religions and languages. There are hundreds or even thousands of tribes, regional languages as well as local beliefs in Indonesia. This diversity is what makes Indonesia unique and 'in the spotlight'.

Diversity has the potential to trigger conflicts if society does not have a sense of tolerance. Tapingku (2020) states that one of the biggest threats that can divide a nation is conflict with a religious background, especially those with acts of violence. This is based on the concept that religion has the basic nature of partisanship which is loaded with emotion, and high subjectivity, so that it almost always creates emotional attachment to its adherents. If this is not accompanied by religious moderation, this will lead to unexpected extremism and even threaten inter-religious harmony.

The government is also aware of this. In 2018, the Government through the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia finally launched the “Religious Moderation” Program (Ministry of Religion, 2018). This is a definite step taken by the Government in tackling the spread of extreme, radical, and terrorist movements. Furthermore, in 2019 the Ministry of Religion released the Pocket Book of Religious Moderation as a reference for the community to understand true religious moderation. It is hoped that this understanding of religious moderation can be internalized by the community, especially adherents of religion so that it can be applied in everyday life. Currently, the Minister of Religion Yaqut Cholil Qoumas reiterated the implementation of this program by declaring 2022 as the year of tolerance. This is a manifestation of the Government's wish to make Indonesia a barometer of religious harmony in the world.

Realizing the importance of this religious moderation, several studies have analyzed religious moderation in Indonesia. Some researchers examine how religious moderation is manifested in various reflections of attitudes such as balance, straight and firm, tolerance, etc. (Fahri and Zainuri, 2019). Other researchers investigated the understanding of religious moderation and intolerance among adolescents in West Java (Al Adawiyah, Tobing, and Handayani, 2020). Other studies highlight how religious moderation is implemented in several places, such as in government agencies (Rofik and Misbah, 2021) and in Blitar Regency (Zamrodi, Rosyadi, Nahdiah, and Widiastuti, 2021). In addition, other researchers recommend the inclusion of this religious moderation material in classroom learning (Sukraini and Farida, 2021).

Central Kalimantan Province is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has a diverse population background, especially from ethnicity, religion and language. Data from the Central Statistics Agency for 2019 noted that the population of Central Kalimantan consists of various tribes dominated by the Dayak tribe and the rest are Banjar, Javanese, Malay, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese, Batak, Bugis, Chinese and other tribes. Meanwhile, the religions embraced by residents in this province are Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, Hinduism/Kaharingan Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism, and others. With the existence of Kaharingan as a local religion adhered to by the Dayak tribe in Central Kalimantan, this further adds to the uniqueness of religious life in Central Kalimantan.

In addition, the Dayak tribe in Central Kalimantan has a *Huma Betang philosophy of life*. *Huma Betang* himself refers to the name of the traditional house of the Dayak tribe which has a long and large shape which in ancient times could function to accommodate many people/families in one building. There are several rules that are made to bind the behavior of every inhabitant of *Huma Betang* so that they are mutually agreed upon which are then poured into customary law (Rahmawati, 2019). It is from here that the values of mutual cooperation, togetherness, tolerance, harmony, and coexistence become values internalized by the Dayak community (Apandi 2017; Rahmawati, 2019) and then implemented in everyday life. This philosophy is of course in line with the spirit of religious moderation currently being echoed in Indonesia.

Pulang Pisau Regency is one of the regencies with a diverse population in Central Kalimantan. Therefore, religious moderation in this area still needs to be further explored. Based on the initial research, the researcher found the practice of religious moderation that had long been carried out by SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau prior to the announcement of religious moderation from the Government. For that reason, a case study at this school needs to be done.

Based on the background mentioned above and a review of previous research, the researcher aims to carry out a case study to provide an in-depth description of the practice of religious moderation at SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau in Central Kalimantan, Indonesia. Because previous research has never touched on the realm of research on the school environment, especially in Central Kalimantan,

the focus of this research is the implementation of religious moderation at this high school level. This research is considered feasible because religious moderation is still an area that still needs to be studied both in theory and in practice.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the practice of religious moderation in Pulang Pisau Regency. It was a case study as it focused specifically on the case of religious moderation practices in SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau. This school has implemented the value of religious moderation for more than ten years long before the Government introduced it. The main informant was the school principal who was the person taking some initiative programs for religious moderation practices in the school. He has been the principal for about eight years. Interview and documentation were occupied to facilitate the researchers collecting the data. The analysis of data was conducted qualitatively through data transcription, data reading, data reduction, data presentation and interpretation, and drawing conclusions.

II. Discussion

Findings

To find out how religious moderation is implemented in the school, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the school principal, who has been in office for eight years. Previously, he had never attended seminars, workshops, or some kind of training on religious moderation. When asked about the meaning of tolerance in his view, he was able to explain it correctly. He said that tolerance is respecting freedom of religion to carry out the teachings of their respective religions. He was also able to explain the meaning of religious moderation. The following is an excerpt of his interview answer.

S: In my opinion, religious moderation is more about this wider religious life being able to live side by side with one another.

According to this assumption, religious moderation is a broader perspective of religious life with the aim of being able to live side by side with one another. So it can be concluded that even though the Principal has never attended training and

seminars on religious moderation, he could acknowledge religious moderation appropriately.

Regarding the importance of implementing religious moderation in schools, the Principal believed that this was imperative considering that schools, especially public schools, must be a means of instilling the understanding that God created people of various ethnicities and religions, and this is a blessing. Unfortunately, according to him, so far the existing education curriculum had not accommodated this religious moderation material in schools, especially in public schools. He explained more clearly as in the following interview excerpt.

S: ...not in the existing Competency Standards, in Islamic, Christian and Hindu Religion education... but in the application of school life it has been integrated, and I often give it in activities such as ceremonies, in meetings, and other activities as well...

From these interviews, it can be concluded that the inculcation of the value of religious moderation in schools had not been accommodated through the curriculum. By far it was only limited to the initiation of the school to instill the value of religious moderation in students.

From the interview excerpt above, the Principal further explained the activities he had initiated in instilling the value of religious tolerance in schools. Besides giving socialization through speech at the flag ceremony or other gathering activities, he had initiated that the prayer at the flag ceremony which were led alternately among the representative of each religious believers in the school. In other words, the prayer recital would be led in turn every week among Muslim, Christian, and Hindu representatives. The percentage of religious believers in the school consisted of 60% Muslims, 35% Christians, and the rest were Hindus. Thus, prayer was not only dominated by one religion, but also other believers had opportunities to lead prayers at the flag ceremony.

Another interesting facts at the school was the existence of *Pesantren Ramadhan* week during the Ramadhan month, a holy month of Muslims. In this week, the Muslims students and teachers were asked to conduct several religious activities to deepen their knowledge and practice of Islam. However, the Principal also suggested other students and teachers from other religions to conduct their

own religious activities in the school in that week. This was expressed by the Principal as follows.

S: Then at certain times, for example in the educational calendar during Ramadan, there are religious strengthening activities even though those who have these events are Muslims but both Christians and Hindus take part in similar activities... So everything is done together (done at the same time). The Islamic ones conduct Pesantren Ramadhan, the Christian with their worship services, preaching competitions, and the Hindu ones had separate events such as their own religious rituals...

From the interview, the Principal explained that he initiated this program by seizing the holiday weeks in *Ramadhan*. At the same time, he wanted every believer of a religion in this school was given the opportunity to take part in their respective religious activities. Furthermore, the Principal explained that the school had provided a separate room for each religion to carry out their religious activities so that their activities would run smoothly. Thus, they had the freedom to carry out their activities without being disturbed. This activity had been carried out since several years ago. The school principal explained that these activities were carried out because he believed that each participant had to learn their own religious knowledge immersively, and it was the responsibility of the school and educators to provide opportunities for strengthening this religion. He considered 3 hours of Religion lessons every week would not be enough. Therefore, it was necessary to such activities to increase the faith of each student. So, it can be concluded that the school had been very good at implementing the strengthening of religious tolerance and moderation as evidenced by these practices for a long time.

The school principal also expressed his hopes regarding the cultivation of religious moderation values in the school environment. He hoped that religious moderation material could be included in the curriculum even though it was integrated in certain subject units. Furthermore, he explained that in the Freedom to Learn Curriculum, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening project will be implemented, namely a project where students are required not only to study in class, but also to be active in relation to Piety to God Almighty. He hoped that the implementation of religious moderation could be included in the project. Since this school was also one of the Mobilizing Schools or *Sekolah Penggerak*, so the

Principal hoped they would be able to implement the project next year, including strengthening the value of religious moderation.

For the practice of religious moderation in schools, the Principal believed that this had been going well in their school. This was indicated by the existence of activities such as taking turns for prayer recital during ceremonies and strengthening religion during the month of Ramadan. Besides, religious moderation could also be seen when there were moments of big celebrations for religions, for example when there were students who celebrate their religious holy days, they also invite other teachers and students to come to their houses. Every time there was a big religious celebration, every religious adherent was given the freedom to carry out their religious activities at school. Based on his observations too, he said the students easily mingled with each other, for example during class or break time. As long as he led the school, there was never any inter-religious or ethnic conflict that occurred.

Furthermore, when asked about which parties were responsible for implementing religious moderation in schools, he answered the Provincial Education Office through supervisors, as well as through religious organizations such as religion-based organizations. Then, the Ministry of Religion in the Regency must also play a role, as well as awareness from parents and also the community to be able to help each other do this.

So, it can be concluded that the practice of religious moderation in schools has actually existed since several years ago as evidenced by the existence of religious activities that accommodate religious moderation initiated by the school. In addition, tolerance among religious communities has been established indicating their harmonious relationship while at school, and the absence of conflicts among them.

Discussion

This research has found several findings regarding the practice of religious moderation in SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau. These latest findings will be discussed further with previous findings and literature in this section.

First, this study found that both the government, community leaders and the educational environment have a big role in forming tolerance and maintaining

inter-religious harmony. This has also been expressed by Prof. M. Quraish Shihab (2020) that the issue of wasathiyah (moderation) is not just an individual matter or interest, but also the affairs and interests of every group, society and country.

In addition, the role of schools is also important in providing a place for students to train the practice of religious moderation and tolerance. Baihaqi (2022) argues that the role of educational institutions in teaching religious moderation is to produce young people who are tolerant, accept differences, and love each other. In this study, it was found that the principal had the initiative to carry out programs that could create an attitude of tolerance and acts of religious moderation in the school environment, even long before the government introduced the religious moderation program. This proves that the educational environment contributes greatly in terms of providing space for the growth of religious tolerance and moderation.

The findings in this study support the concept of internalizing religious moderation mentioned by Hidayati and Harahap (2020). They state that there are several ways to internalize religious moderation, especially among the younger generation. Some of them are the process of habituation, exemplary, and learning models. If the school is able to apply these methods, it is hoped that the instilling the value of religious moderation in students will be more effective when compared to just lecturing.

III. Closing

Conclusion

This case study has unveiled the practice of religious moderation carried out at SMAN 1 Pulang Pisau. Based on the findings, it was found out the school has taken some initiative actions by setting programs that enhance the practice of religious moderation among students and teachers. These actions has been done for more than several years, even before the Religious Moderation program launched by the Government. It shows that education institutions, especially at school level, can give a great contribution on giving an exemplary of how religious moderation should be implemented and the impact made that can create a harmony among religious believers starting from the young generation.

Suggestion

A number of suggestions are offered as follows.

1. The schools and other institutions should take initiative actions to support the practice of religious moderation in their surroundings.
2. For researchers who are interested in exploring more about the existence of religious moderation in an area, it is important to include the observation method as well to get a complete picture of the practice of religious moderation.
3. This research only observed one public school, thus it is suggested for further research wishing to observe the practice of religious moderation in the education environment to place at schools from various levels and formal/non-formal.

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