

## **Analysis of the Application of Religious Moderation in Pre-School Institutions in Purwakarta District**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to explore the application of religious moderation in early childhood education (ece) institutions. Religious moderation is an approach that emphasizes balance and tolerance in religion, and rejects extremism and fanaticism. In the context of paud, religious moderation is very important because this period is a critical stage in the formation of children's character and basic values. The methodology in this study uses a qualitative descriptive method approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews with educators, and documentation. The results showed that the implementation of religious moderation in paud is going well in several aspects, such as the integration of tolerance values in learning and inclusive activities that involve various religious backgrounds. However, there are challenges in its implementation, especially the alignment between theory and practice and the varied understanding among educators. The findings indicate that with proper implementation of religious moderation, paud institutions can be an effective tool in shaping a young generation that is tolerant, inclusive and appreciative of diversity. This research suggests increased training and counseling for educators on the importance of religious moderation, as well as the development of a more comprehensive curriculum to support diversity and tolerance from an early age.

**Keywords:** *Religious Moderation; ECD Institutions; Early Childhood*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia, as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, is often regarded as a model of harmony between Islam, democracy, and modernity. Religious education plays a vital role in shaping religious attitudes and behaviors from an early age, and Early Childhood Education (ECE) holds an important role in forming the character and religious values of children, which will become the foundation of their lives. Religious moderation for early childhood involves a balanced and tolerant approach to religious teachings in shaping children's values and beliefs. It not only includes understanding religious teachings but also teaches tolerance, appreciation of differences, and mutual respect among religious communities. In this concept of religious moderation, it is important to prioritize fundamental religious values such as compassion, justice, and brotherhood without emphasizing extremism. Tolerance and appreciation of differences become the foundation for children in viewing the diversity of beliefs and religious practices. They are taught that everyone has the right to choose their own religious beliefs

without judging or demeaning others. The attitude of respecting and loving fellow human beings, regardless of religious differences, is also a focus in building a positive foundation for pluralism and interfaith harmony. Additionally, religious moderation includes education about universal moral values such as honesty, justice, integrity, and other positive attitudes that can be applied in daily life. The role of family and educators is crucial in guiding children to understand and apply the values of religious moderation in their lives.

However, in recent years, issues of intolerance and radicalism have infiltrated the education system, including Early Childhood Education (ECE) and elementary schools. A viral case in 2020 involving kindergarten students chanting "Islam Islam Yes, Infidel Infidel No" highlighted the infiltration of intolerant ideologies in early childhood education institutions. The video showed kindergarten children loudly chanting this slogan, reflecting the early indoctrination of intolerant attitudes. This incident underscores the significant challenge in instilling values of religious moderation in educational institutions. Religious moderation is a crucial approach to countering radical and intolerant ideologies. ECE institutions serve as the first foundation in the formal education system, where children begin to learn about their social environment. In this context, ECE institutions have the responsibility to introduce children to the concept of religious moderation in a simple yet effective manner. Implementing religious moderation from an early age can help children grow into individuals who appreciate differences and can live harmoniously in a pluralistic society.

Research on the implementation of religious moderation in ECE institutions is important given the current global situation that often displays religious tension and conflict. The implementation of religious moderation in early childhood education institutions is expected to be a long-term solution in creating a more tolerant generation capable of living in harmony amidst diversity. This aligns with the national education goals, which include developing the potential of students to become individuals who are faithful, pious, morally upright, healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and democratic, as well as responsible citizens. Research conducted by Nurhadi et al., "Religious Moderation in Education: Strategies to Counter Radicalism in Schools," also emphasizes the importance of moderate education in fostering tolerance among children. Nurhadi asserts that moderate education should start from ECE to ensure that children understand and accept diversity as part of their daily lives. Further study by Hasan (2018) states that religious moderation education is effective in shaping tolerant attitudes in early childhood within formal education institutions. Previous research indicates that education emphasizing values of tolerance and religious moderation can reduce the potential for intolerance and conflict in the future. Additionally, findings from Nur Islam's research on religious moderation in early childhood education at RA UIN Sunan Kalijaga highlight the urgency of this research due to Indonesia's diverse society and the rise of radical groups. The study shows that educators at RA UIN Sunan Kalijaga understand and effectively implement religious moderation using various methods and media.

Subsequent research conducted by Farah Narun found that the implementation of interactive multimedia, particularly the game "Kids Moderations," can significantly enhance children's attitudes towards religious moderation. This study concluded that teaching religious moderation through interactive multimedia positively impacts the development of moderate religious attitudes in early childhood. Therefore, it can be concluded that Indonesia, being a country with great religious and cultural diversity, requires the implementation of religious moderation to maintain social harmony. ECE institutions hold a strategic role in instilling fundamental values that will shape children's future character. Hence, it is essential to research how religious moderation is implemented in ECE institutions to ensure that values of tolerance, mutual respect, and harmony are taught from an early age.

## **METHODS**

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive approach to understand the implementation of religious moderation in early childhood education (ECE) institutions. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, where the researcher selected samples based on the following considerations: (1) schools that accept students from various religious backgrounds; (2) schools located in Purwakarta Regency; (3) schools that have students within the early childhood age range; (4) schools with operational permits and legal status; (5) accredited schools. Data collection techniques include interviews and observations. The researcher observed the learning processes in these institutions. The three schools selected by the researcher are: (1) a school established by a foundation with an Islamic background, where all the teachers are Muslim; (2) a school established by a non-Islamic foundation, where all the teachers are non-Muslim; (3) a school established by a non-Islamic foundation, but the teachers are both Muslim and non-Muslim. The observation process involved monitoring the children's daily development, including observing activities at school, home, and the surrounding environment. The interviews were open-ended, where the researcher prepared questions but did not provide answers, allowing respondents to answer freely based on their experiences.

The three ECE institutions were chosen because the researcher believed they represented a variety of sample selection criteria: (1) two teachers from a school founded by an Islamic foundation with all Muslim teachers; (2) four teachers from a school founded by a non-Islamic foundation with all non-Muslim teachers; (3) two teachers from a school founded by a non-Islamic foundation with both Muslim and non-Muslim teachers. Research ethics were maintained by obtaining permission from participants, ensuring data confidentiality, and ensuring participants' comfort and safety. The primary focus is on the implementation of religious moderation in ECE institutions. The researcher used data analysis techniques outlined by Miles and Huberman (Melati, 2021), including data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. Data reduction

involves summarizing and focusing on essential aspects of the research, concentrating on the implementation of religious moderation in ECE institutions. Data presentation involves providing a narrative description of all information found during field research activities. Data verification is the final stage that helps formulate overall conclusions from the data to address the research problems.

The data analysis technique uses triangulation according to Moleong (2005), which includes four types of data triangulation: Source triangulation involves collecting data from various sources, such as interviews with teachers and direct observations. Method triangulation involves using various data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and data analysis. Interviews can provide direct insights from teachers' perspectives, while observations can offer an understanding of actual actions in everyday situations.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The researchers interviewed 8 teachers from three selected early childhood education institutions (PAUD) in the study on the implementation of religious moderation. The background of the three institutions studied is as follows: The first institution is a PAUD located in Citeko Village, Plered Subdistrict, Purwakarta Regency, established by a Muslim individual with the aim of facilitating children in the Citeko area to attend school. This institution is general-based, accepting students of any religion, not just one particular faith, although all the teachers are Muslim. The second institution was founded by a church foundation in Purwakarta and is located in Purwakarta Subdistrict. This institution is also general-based, accepting students of any religion, and even the teachers come from various religious backgrounds. The third institution, also located in Purwakarta Subdistrict, has been in existence since 1971. It is the first school established by non-Muslims in Purwakarta Regency, with teachers from various religious backgrounds. The respondents interviewed from these three institutions included 2 (IS and EK) from the first institution, 2 (AP and EF) from the second institution, and 4 (BF, AF, ED, DG) from the third institution. All respondents were chosen for the interviews because these teachers have extensive experience teaching students of all religions in their classrooms.

Religious moderation, which includes attitudes of tolerance, appreciation of differences, and mutual respect among religious communities, is crucial for promoting the fundamental values of religion such as compassion, justice, and brotherhood without emphasizing extremism. Tolerance and appreciation of differences become the foundation for children in understanding the diversity of beliefs and religious practices. However, knowledge about religious moderation among teachers is very limited. None of the respondents interviewed knew what religious moderation is. They only understood that when there are students of different religions attending their institutions, what is

needed is mutual respect and preventing them from being teased by their peers. All teachers believe that all children are entitled to the same educational services and should not be discriminated against based on religion, although religious teachings must be explained differently due to differences in beliefs.

The concept of religious moderation applied in the three institutions varies significantly. Each institution has its strengths in teaching religion, but each institution has a foundational religion it adheres to, and the teachers' religious backgrounds greatly influence how religious moderation is taught in each institution. The first institution is dominated by Islam, and all the teachers are Muslim. As a result, they (the teachers) are not willing to teach non-Islamic religious practices to their students, such as how to pray according to other religions, because they (the teachers) do not have the knowledge and skills to teach such practices. Therefore, for non-Islamic religious practices, teachers recommend that non-Muslim students learn from their parents. At this school, Islamic teachings are taught daily, and non-Muslim students may participate if they wish, but the school does not provide facilities for non-Muslim students to learn their own religion. Consequently, non-Muslim students who hear Islamic prayers and worship practices daily become familiar with and can follow them.

The second institution, established by a church foundation, can be considered very tolerant. This is evident from the school's activities, which encourage students to visit their respective places of worship. If the teacher is Muslim, Muslim students are taught to learn about Islam, and the teacher also encourages non-Muslim students to learn about their own religions through religious teachers at their places of worship. Once a week, all students are asked to report on their religious studies at their places of worship with their respective religious teachers. The school allows students the freedom to learn their religion with religious teachers according to their faith. The third institution, also established by a church foundation, predominantly teaches non-Islamic religious doctrines. Students attending this school are not required to follow these teachings but are not provided with facilities to learn other religions. Among the three institutions, the second institution stands out for its strong emphasis on tolerance, appreciation of differences, and mutual respect among religious communities. The first and third institutions tend to lean more towards the religion adhered to by their founders, with very little facilitation for the religious diversity of students.

Daily activities such as inclusive prayers and joint celebrations of religious holidays help children recognize and appreciate religious diversity. The curricula of the three institutions still lack integration of religious moderation values, such as lessons on character education, ways of worship, belief in God, storytelling, and games that emphasize tolerance and cooperation. However, it is apparent that the second PAUD institution has made significant innovations in teaching religious moderation by diversifying learning activities within the institution. Teachers' strategies for teaching religious moderation vary widely. The first PAUD institution teaches religious differences primarily through lectures, where teachers explain differences in worship, prayer, and

other practices. However, teachers still struggle to use teaching media effectively, as they lack understanding of non-Islamic religious education, so they only provide general explanations.

The second PAUD institution employs a more varied approach to teaching religious diversity by engaging children in discussions. This allows all children to think critically and centers learning on the child, enabling them to develop their understanding of religious concepts. The third PAUD institution also relies on photos and videos to support religious diversity education at the school. Efforts to respect religious differences are not yet evident at the first institution, as it predominantly reflects the religion of the school's founder. In contrast, the second and third institutions show respect for religious differences, such as acknowledging Muslims who are fasting and celebrating major religious holidays.

Similarly, the involvement of parents and school staff in respecting religious differences is very apparent at the third institution. If a child wishes to participate in a religious competition, the school staff helps with teaching, and parents are actively involved, ensuring that children are prepared to participate in the competition in accordance with their beliefs. The challenges faced by the three institutions in implementing religious moderation are quite distinct. At the first institution, the dominant religious background of the school's owner, combined with teachers who share the same religious background, means that students of different religions from the owner and teachers do not receive education about their own faiths. Instead, they follow the religious teachings provided by the school and become very familiar with these teachings, even if they differ from their own beliefs. This issue is similar at the third institution, where the religious teachings of the school's owner and teachers dominate, forcing many students to follow the religious practices of the school's owner and teachers.

In contrast, the second PAUD institution has updated its educational system significantly, allowing students to study according to their own religions. However, a major challenge for the institution arises when students of different religions enter the school. The religion of these students can be uncertain due to differences in parental beliefs or even differences between the students' parents and their grandparents. For example, a child might follow the religion of their grandfather, even though it differs from their parents' religion. This creates a significant challenge for the institution in determining the appropriate religious stance for each student. This is particularly critical during early childhood, as this period is crucial for shaping the child's future and building their character.

Another challenge is that many students are not accepted into some advanced educational institutions due to religious differences. Consequently, students may have to attend schools far from their homes to continue their education at higher levels. The desired innovations from the three institutions include the need for training and resources such as books that support learning. If there are students attending the PAUD institutions, teachers could use these resources to facilitate the teaching of religious

moderation and the differences between religions in the school. Some institutions also wish to introduce various religions by visiting places of worship for all faiths. Additionally, there are plans to set up mini places of worship within the schools so that each student can pray according to their own religion whenever they wish. PAUD teachers also hope for regular training on religious moderation and how to apply it in teaching activities, as teachers play a central role in facilitating religious moderation at PAUD. Ongoing training and support from educational institutions are necessary to ensure that teachers can be effective facilitators in this area.

## CONCLUSION

Research on the implementation of religious moderation in three PAUD institutions in Purwakarta reveals variations in approach and challenges faced. The first institution, dominated by Islamic teachings, and the third institution, which is focused on non-Islamic teachings, provide limited facilitation for religious diversity, while the second institution is more tolerant and inclusive. Teachers' knowledge of religious moderation is still minimal, and the curricula at all three institutions are not well-integrated to teach moderation values. The second institution has made innovations in teaching religious moderation, whereas the first and third institutions remain focused on the dominant religious teachings. Major challenges include the dominance of the school owner's religion and uncertainty regarding the religion followed by students. To improve the implementation of religious moderation, ongoing training and support for teachers are needed, along with the introduction of diverse religions through more varied and inclusive activities.

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