



The Engagement of Islamic Religious Education Teachers of Primary Schools in Semarang in Instilling Religious Moderation

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Abstract

The study is focused on exploring the engagement of Islamic Religious Education teachers of primary schools in Semarang in instilling religious moderation. It specifically examines aspects such as the teachers' comprehension of religious moderation, their commitment, their effort and their obstacles in instilling religious moderation. The research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method, gathering data through interview, questionnaire, observation, and documentation. The findings revealed that while most of the Islamic Religious Education teachers of primary schools in Semarang participating in this study had a good understanding of religious moderation, some teachers still did not understand the concept of religious moderation comprehensively. Although most teachers had a serious commitment and had begun the process of introducing religious moderation to students, a small number of others admitted that they were just about to do so. The teachers made efforts differently in instilling religious moderation to the students, including among others, inserting messages of religious moderation and encouraging student to practice the values of religious moderation both in learning activities in the classroom and outside the classroom. Most teachers encountered obstacles in their struggles to instill religious moderation in students, both internal and external. Internally, the children were noisy and did not focus on listening to the teacher's explanation. Externally, the time provided by the school is very limited. Based on the findings, this study suggests the need for a serious training to strengthen competency in religious moderation and its



implementation for Islamic religious education teachers in elementary schools.

Keywords: Islamic religious education; Primary schools; Religious moderation; Classroom learning

INTRODUCTION

There are still many cases of students being exposed to radicalism In Indonesia (Afrianty, 2012), even Islamic radicalism is said to have spread to the world of education (Abdallah, 2016) and made students in schools the target of recruitment by radical groups to be brainwashed with certain radical ideologies (Asril, 2016: 284). There is an assumption that students in schools are the young generation who are weak to being penetrated by radicalism that justifies violence in performing the teachings they believe in (Tambak, 2021). Therefore, educationists must take seriously the problem of intolerance due to religious differences that occurs in schools and education (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Findings from research conducted by the Institute for the Study of Islam and Peace (LaKIP) on radicalism among students throughout Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang and Bekasi (Jabodetabek) in 2011 stated that nearly 50 percent of the total number of students surveyed expressed support for radical actions in the name of defending religion (Admin Kemenag.go.id, 2024). This is certainly a concern for all of us, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers (Munip, 2012: 160). Given the current situation, introducing the concept of religious moderation to students in educational institutions is a necessity that must be undertaken.

In Indonesian academic circles, the term “religious moderation” has been discussed intensely especially after the government of the Republic of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, proclaimed 2019 as the year of religious moderation. In the opinion of Lukman Hakim Saifuddin (former Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia) moderate in religion means being able to share the truth as long as it does not deviate and is in accordance with religious interpretation, remains confident in the essence of the religious teachings adhered to, which teaches about fair and balanced principles (Purbajati, 2020, p. 186). Religious moderation must be implemented within society to prevent conflict and create harmony between religious communities (Fahrudin et al., 2021). For policy purposes, religious moderation can be optimized to prevent the increase of radicalism (Hidayat et al., 2020).

In the Islamic context, religious moderation is the same as the concept of Islamic *wasathiyah*, an essential exposition that acts to counterweight violence committed by those who fail to comprehend the fundamental character of Islam (Arif, 2020). It is a concept that underlines the significance of equilibrium, justice, and prosperity, which are accomplished as a capital of realizing honesty,

humankind, and tolerance (Akhmadi, 2019; Niam, 2019). It is an understanding of Islam that rejects ferocity, protects the subjugated, combats extremism, condemns radicalism, rejects coercion, and hates terrorism (Fitri, 2015).

Religious moderation is designed here to bring persons into a modest understanding, namely not being severe in religion, and not idolizing the ratio that thinks liberally with no boundaries (Hefni, 2020: 2). Education is the most effective medium for sowing and spreading an ideology. In this context, to instill the values of Islamic moderation, education is the strategic choice. Therefore, educational institutions should be able to be at the forefront as a medium to introduce a tolerant, friendly, and moderate Islam (Hermawan, 2020: 32).

Religious moderation is also often referred to as *wasathiyyah*. Etymologically, the word *wasathiyyah* can be translated into middle ground and modest. It originates from the Arabic root word *wasatha* which means middle. Therefore, *wasathiyyah* means to make something to be in the middle (Kasdi, 2019, p. 181). It has similarity with *al-tawasuth* or *al-wasath* (moderation), *al-qisth* (justice), *al-tawazun* (balance), and *al-i'tidal* (harmony) (Hilmy, 2013, p. 25), and the derivative word means just or fair, the best, the chosen (in quality), the finest (as an art) and respectable. As an example of this is such an expression as: “the most *wasath* means something which is the best, the most just and the chosen” (Mujani et al., 2015, p. 66). One of the best means to empower the *wasathiyyah* or religious moderation is through the learning process in education, and this can be started from the primary education.

Primary education can be described as the most fundamental education and is the route to further education (Marmoah et al., 2021: 787). It is the first formal educational level to improve students’ prospective (Wuryandani et al., 2014). Thus, primary school is significant in developing well-qualified personalities (Hanief & Sugito, 2015). Basic education is held for six years in elementary school and three years in junior high school. This basic education can be in the form of institutions such as *Sekolah Dasar (SD)* and *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI)* (referred to as primary schools) as well as *Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP)* and *Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTS)* (referred to as junior high school) (*Peraturan Pemerintah Republik Indonesia Nomor 28 Tahun 1990 Tentang Pendidikan Dasar; Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*). The primary education intended in this study is the level of education that prepares the development and growth of students to be able to compete and be able to undergo education at the secondary level later.

This study discusses the engagement of Islamic Religious Education teachers of primary schools in Semarang in instilling religious moderation. This is intended to complement previous studies, such as the study by Sutrisno (2019) which emphasized importance of religious moderation to be implemented in the life of the

nation and state, particularly in a diverse society like Indonesia; the study by Anwar (2021) which stressed that the attitude of national commitment, diversity, tolerance, humankind, and local wisdom are tenets that need to be taught and imparted in primary childhood in the household as an exertion to prevent radicalism; as well as the study by AR (2020) which advised the need for a person to have a balanced nature and avoid exclusivity and extremes and to always instill a moderate attitude into the soul and mind of students so that they become individuals who have tolerance and spread compassion to others.

Educational institutions can play a strategic role in reducing acts of violence in the name of religion. Teachers in educational institutions are encouraged to prioritize teaching about mutual respect among members of the community. This can be started by teachers at the lowest level of education, namely elementary schools. Therefore, introducing religious moderation to students in elementary schools is important. This has motivated us to research the implementation of religious moderation to students in elementary schools in the city of Semarang.

This research aims to answer questions about: How teachers' understanding of the concept of religious moderation, Teachers' commitment in instilling the concept of religious moderation, Teachers' efforts in instilling the concept of religious moderation, Teachers' obstacles in instilling the concept of religious moderation in students. The expected outcome of this study is to find out what happens in the practice of introducing religious moderation at the elementary school level. So, the findings from the field had certainly become the novelty of this study to enrich the existing body of knowledge in the field of religious moderation.

METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative research method with a descriptive qualitative approach. The characteristics of qualitative research include that information is taken directly from the field, the researcher becomes a tool that will determine the success of the research, it emphasizes the process of explaining data and facts obtained from the field, the process of conducting research takes precedence over the results obtained (Danim, 2002: 60-61). In this research, two types of data were utilized: primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through the techniques of interview, questionnaire, observation, and documentation. Interviews and questionnaires (Google Form) were jointly applied to 41 teachers of Islamic Religious Education from 38 different primary schools which are spread across thirteen sub-districts in the city of Semarang. The reason for choosing the Islamic Religious Education teachers as respondents in this study was because they were individuals responsible for providing religious understanding to students directly. The investigation for this study was conducted during the research period (September-November 2023). The teachers who agreed to be respondents for this

study came from schools under different management, namely: Education Office of Semarang, Ma'arif of Nahdlatul Ulama, Integrated Islamic Network, Al-Azhar Foundation, Muhammadiyah, and Nasima Foundation of Semarang. In this study, the techniques of interview and questionnaire were used to collect information concerning the teachers' comprehension of religious moderation, their commitment, their effort and their obstacles in instilling religious moderation. Participants observation was used to confirm what was obtained from interviews and questionnaires regarding teachers' efforts and obstacles in instilling religious moderation. Meanwhile, documentation was used to scrutiny data related to the identity of the schools and teachers. On the other hand, secondary data such as books and articles in journals were used as a theoretical basis, especially when conducting analysis.

After the data had been collected we carried out data analysis by using Merriam's (1998) approach. Merriam defines analysis as the process of making sense of data. The process of making sense of data involves combining, summarizing, and interpreting the respondents' responses and the researchers' observations and readings. In this study, we conducted process analysis and result analysis. Process analysis was done by recording and interpreting the information we had obtained. The obtained data were classified by the way of reading and grouping them according to the arranged pattern based on the focus of study. Result analysis was carried out by giving meaning according to the formulation of the problem determined. The relevant data were developed and merged with other data obtained from other text sources as a process of data verification before finally presented.

RESULTS

1. The teachers's comprehension on the concept of religious moderation

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires obtained, most of the teachers of Islamic religious education subjects in primary schools in Semarang had a good knowledge regarding the concept religious moderation. The following is a summary of views of the respondents (R). Religious moderation was interpreted as an effort to respect and appreciate adherents of other religions in accordance with their beliefs and not impose someone's way of worship or religion on others (R1, R6, R15, R17). There were respondents who understood religious moderation as the condition that one believes in the truth of one's own religion "radically" but still appreciates and respects adherents of other religions who believe in their religion, without having to justify it (R9, R29, R30, R31). Here the emphasis is on respecting adherents of other religions.

There was another view which stated that religious moderation emphasizes mutual respect, cooperation between religious communities, and rejection of

extremism or intolerance and fosters empathy (R3, R7, R8). Religious moderation was understood as the foundation for building an inclusive, a just and peaceful society. It involves all parties to work together in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect, and to avoid attitudes that could threaten harmony between religious groups (R5, R19, R20, R21). Some interpreted religious moderation as religious harmony to avoid conflict and create peace (R2, R4, R32). They emphasized the importance of mutual respect, reject extremism or intolerance, avoid conflict and create peace.

There are still more views expressed by respondents, that religious moderation is essentially believing in the truth of one's own religion and appreciating and respecting adherents of other religions without having to justify it to lead a life of *rahmatan lil alamin*, a concept that emphasizes mutual respect and tolerance among different religious groups, and at the same time not being fanatical (R12, R13, R14, R16, R18, R23, R24, R25). In addition, it is important to uphold justice and balance in religion (R10, R11). They affirm the importance of mutual respect and tolerance, justice and balance in religion.

2. *The teachers' commitment in introducing religious moderation*

Based on the results of interviews and questionnaires obtained, most of the teachers of Islamic religious education subjects in primary schools in Semarang had strong commitment in introducing religious moderation to the students. We wanted to find out whether instilling a moderate attitude towards religion in primary school students is necessary given their young age. The responses were threefold: first, those who said "necessary and very important" were 5 respondents (12%), second, those who thought "necessary and important" were 35 respondents (83%), and third, those who thought "not necessary" were 1 respondent (3%). Respondents who stated it was "necessary and very important" to instill moderate attitudes in religion to children since elementary education argued that teaching values must be done since childhood to foster the character of global diversity, mutual respect and being reasonable because people are living in a society that has different religions. So, the cultivation of moderation must begin at an early age so that students have a strong foundation related to religious moderation that they become moderate in practicing religion, and it must be taken for the sake of national unity and progress (R19, R20, 24, R32, R33).

Respondents who stated it was "necessary and important" to instill moderate attitudes in religion argued that it was significant to convey this notion earlier because it would make students know better about the importance of religious moderation (R1, R16, R17). When students were still at elementary school, they should have been given the best explanation regarding moderate attitudes in religion so that they would not be trapped in a group fanaticism that they could avoid extremism and radicalism (R2, R3, R13). Other respondents were of the

opinion that instilling a moderate attitude in elementary school age children is important to provide them with a basic foundation because moderation and tolerance will create peace in relationships (R4, R6). With a moderate understanding, people can avoid the emergence of gaps in people's lives and will achieve an understanding and practice of Islam which is *rahmatan lil alamin* (R12, R18, R21, R22, R25).

There are also those who convey the reason for the importance of instilling a moderate attitude in religion from the elementary education level by asserting that it is so because students have had a sense of empathy and mutual respect for others embedded in them since childhood. This must be conveyed to students since they were in elementary school because it is a foundation before moving on to the next level of education (R7, R8, R35, R40, R41). Some respondents admitted that so far what happened at the school where they have been working has been no consideration of introducing religious moderation, so at this time it is necessary to instill religious moderation from an early age (R15, R31, R36). Meanwhile, respondent who answered it was "not necessary" to instill religious moderation in elementary school students forwarded the reason briefly, namely, because the students were still too young to understand this concept (R17).

3. The teachers' efforts in instilling religious moderation

Based on the results of interviews, questionnaires and observation obtained, most of the teachers of Islamic religious education subjects in primary schools in Semarang made serious efforts in instilling religious moderation to the students. However, there were still a few teachers who did not take it seriously. When asked about their efforts in introducing religious moderation to students, their answers varied. The following is a summary of their responses. One of the teachers said that as an effort to instill religious moderation he always taught the values of religious moderation to students in his class, he emphasized that each class should be able to understand and practice the values of religious moderation (R10). Another one expressed his experience by saying, "I introduce religious moderation during habituation before teaching and learning process by conveying the purpose and objective of religious moderation and giving them some examples" (R8). One female teacher told the effort she had made. She always inserted messages of religious moderation when delivering Islamic religious education lessons. As a teacher, she has played an important role in the introduction of religious moderation, for example in the subjects of *akidah akhlak* (faith and morals) she explained that Islam is a religion of *rahmatan lil alamin* and its adherents must take a moderate path (R14).

Several teachers shared similar stories about the efforts they made. They always linked lessons to the concept of religious moderation when delivering Islamic religious education subjects. They instilled the values of religious

moderation both in teaching and learning activities inside and outside the classroom (R16, R19, R29). Others explained their efforts in introducing the concept of moderation by providing examples of actions in everyday life, delivering certain material to students, then developing and inserting messages of religious moderation (R20, R24, R28, R32). Apart from the experiences mentioned earlier, there were practices from other teachers who stated that they made efforts to instill moderation and tolerance by explaining the concept of moderation and religious tolerance, either directly or inserting it in each subject, and by inviting students to watch videos about differences and diversity in Indonesia (R30, R33).

Other teachers shared their experience of the efforts they made. They said that they instilled the values of religious moderation and tolerance in students at school by inviting them to help each other. They explained to students that helping each other is a commendable attitude that must be possessed and practiced (R34, R37). Meanwhile, one respondent gave his opinion that it is important to give students an understanding not to insult other religions and respect each other. In addition, teachers need to provide examples of the implementation of religious moderation and religious tolerance. This can be conveyed to students during class lessons and during joint ceremonies (R39). There was a teacher who shared his experience. He said that in the class he taught there were students who were of a religion other than Islam. The efforts he made were when it was the time for the Islamic religious education lesson, the non-Muslim students were invited to do other activities (for example reading books in the library) or if they wanted to stay in the class they were asked to be quiet and respect their friends who were studying Islam (R38).

4. *The teachers' obstacle in instilling religious moderation*

Based on the results of interviews, questionnaires and observation obtained, most of the teachers of Islamic religious education subjects in primary schools in Semarang face obstacles in instilling religious moderation the students. The majority (90%) claimed to have encountered obstacles when teaching about religious moderation, and the rest (10%) stated that they did not find significant obstacles. Several teachers who admitted to experiencing obstacles stated that what they often experienced was that children tended to play around and make noise in class, not all students understood the concept of religious moderation conveyed by the teacher, on the other hand there were several students who were very dominant in class so that they influenced the attitudes of other students (R4, R5).

Another obstacle that teachers also often encountered was that there were students who still did not really understand what religious moderation was because it was something new. The teachers admitted that the way to overcome this is by providing an understanding and examples of religious moderation repeatedly. This is especially true for the lower classes (grades 1 and 2) in elementary schools, because they still cannot digest things that are not concrete (R31, R32, R34). Based

on our direct observation of a female teacher who was teaching in class, we found that this teacher had difficulty controlling her students who were noisy and not focused on listening to the teacher's explanation. The effort that the teacher has made to overcome this obstacle is to tell the children to be disciplined and listen to the teacher's explanation. This confirms what the teacher explained through the google form questionnaire and direct interview regarding the existence of students who are not focused on listening to the teacher is really happening (Observation, 26-Oct-2023).

There is an interesting confession from other teachers. They encountered obstacles in the form of Muslim students in their class who considered non-Muslim students as foreigners. The way to overcome this, according to the teachers, is to create joint activities that must be followed by all students, both Muslims and non-Muslims, so that familiarity is established between them (R7, R21). Another teacher added, the obstacle she encountered was that children still did not understand what they said when joking with friends of different religions, she overcame it by providing an understanding and explanation of what can and cannot be made jokes, especially related to religious teachings (R25). One female teacher recognized that she had experienced obstacles when conveying religious moderation in her class, namely in the form of bullying from boys to their friends during deliberations. To overcome this, the teacher showed video clips related to religious moderation and then invited the students to express their opinions together (R39).

One teacher mentioned that the obstacle she encountered was that children still felt taboo with symbols of other religions, when she confronted this obstacle, she overcame it by explaining the concept of moderation and tolerance in religion (R26). Another obstacle was faced by a teacher in her class. It was the presence of students who were less focused, and there were difficulties of giving understanding to active and nosy children, so the way to overcome this was that they were given a game, of course this could reduce the time for the teacher to instill the values of moderation (R22). In addition to all the things mentioned above, there are still more obstacles experienced by the teachers. One teacher admitted that she still encountered some of her students who like to disturb their friends during worship. She deals with this by advising them and making them understand that what they were doing was wrong (R18).

Other teachers shared their experiences. The obstacle they encountered was that sometimes students assume that religions other than Islam are not good, so the way to overcome it, according to these teachers, is to promote an attitude of religious tolerance to the children and explain to them that everyone has an obligation to respect the beliefs of others (R1, R27). The obstacle most complained about by teachers is the limited time provided for Islamic religious education subjects, which are only given two meeting hours per week in public elementary schools. This time constraint makes it difficult for teachers to make children

understand about religious moderation (R10, R11, R12, R14). Meanwhile, several teachers who claimed not to encounter any obstacles in instilling religious moderation teachings in the classroom argued that this was solely because all the students they taught were Muslim (R3, R6).

DISCUSSION

1. The teachers's comprehension on the concept of religious moderation

The teachers have expressed their views on the concept of religious moderation which, as illustrated in the results section, emphasize the importance of such things as: respecting adherents of other religions, mutual respect, rejecting extremism or intolerance, avoiding conflict and creating peace, and promoting tolerance, justice and balance in religion.

In the perspective of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia (2019), the measures of religious moderation are as follows: (1) National commitment. National commitment becomes a benchmark for whether someone falls into a radical or moderate ideology because most radical movements adopt the ideology of the caliphate or the shari'ah state. The concept of the nation state is considered as heresy, *tagut* and infidel which is not based on Islamic teachings. (2) Tolerance. Tolerance is important because most radical groups will never tolerate differences in religious interpretation among Muslims. As soon as there are differences in religious interpretations, the different groups will be considered heretics, infidels (*takfir*), apostates and the like. (3) Anti-violence. Moderates always use peaceful means in carrying out socio-political transformation, not violence. (4) Accommodating to local culture. If moderates accommodate local culture, radical groups consider it as heresy, *shirk* and deviate from the true teachings of Islam (Huda, 2021, p. 289). As for the values of moderation in Islam, as quoted in (Umah et al., 2019, pp. 820–821) there are twelve values, namely: (1) Taking the middle path (*Tawassuth*), (2) Straight and firm (*I'tidal*), (3) Balance (*Tawazun*), (4) Egalitarian (*Musawah*), (5) Tolerance (*Tasamuh*), (6) Deliberation (*Shura*), (7) Reform (*Ishlah*), (8) Priority (*Awlawiyah*), (9) Dynamic and innovative (*Tathawwur wa ibkar*), (10) Civilized (*Tahadhur*), (11) Nationality (*Wathaniyah wa uwathanah*), and (2) Exemplary (*Qudwah*).

What was voiced by the teacher respondents in this study, as described in the result above, has largely been in accordance with indicators and principles of religious moderation outlined by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In other words, most of the teachers already have good knowledge about the concept of religious moderation, although it must be admitted that some teachers still did not understand the concept of religious moderation comprehensively. Therefore, upgrading teacher competence in terms of religious

moderation and its implementation in primary schools is now a necessity that cannot be negotiated.

2. *The teachers' commitment in introducing religious moderation*

Most of the teachers have shown a strong commitment to provide an explanation of religious moderation to their students, as they believed that equipping children with moderate teachings was better started early when the children were still young. This is in accordance with the theories of several scholars in this regard. The introduction and cultivation of religious moderation values to students must start from an early age and from the basic education level so that students can have the correct knowledge, appreciation and practice of religion so that they do not fall into the wrong religious understanding with extreme or radical interpretations of religious teachings (Karni, 2020). Primary education is an important and strategic place to instill moderate religious understanding (*wasathiyah* Islam) so that students can live in harmony in the midst of this pluralistic society.

Of course, the process of embedding moderate Islamic ideology is not an easy thing, but it can be done. Moderate Islam can be taught and instilled through the introduction of the concept of religious moderation to students when teachers are teaching in their respective classes. We believe that this work can be started and run smoothly if there is determination and commitment from elementary school teachers to introduce the concept of religious moderation in their respective classes.

In order to mainstream moderate Islam, what needs to be done is the cultivation of moderate Islamic ideology to students in the learning process. There are at least three things that need to be considered. First, it is necessary to emphasize moderate Islam in formulating educational goals. Second, to internalize moderate values in designing the hidden curriculum. Third, to filter teaching materials so that moderate Islamic ideology can be embedded into the minds of students (Suharto, 2017: 175). Religious moderation in the hidden curriculum can be interpreted as an effort to teach tolerant and inclusive attitudes as values conveyed in the learning process, not as a course. So then there is no difference between Psychology lecturers and Islamic Religious Education lecturers in implementing the hidden curriculum because the target is not the lecture material but the value itself (Ardiansyah & Erihadiana, 2022).

From the description above, it can be seen that although a small number of teachers are less committed to instilling moderation in elementary school students because the students are still too young, the majority of teacher respondents believe that it is important to introduce moderation to children at a young age, because what is instilled in children when they are young will be firmly embedded and become the foundation that will support the burden of the building they will live when they grow up later.

3. The teachers' efforts in instilling religious moderation

It should be noted here that strengthening religious moderation in schools must begin with the determination of all parties to work together to get used to interacting with all groups and not seem to only stand in one group. This dedication has been proven by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, which says that the Ministry of Religious Affairs is the ministry of all religions (Harmi, 2022, p. 94). It remains only how all subordinates apply this ethos in educational institutions.

Islamic Religious Education teachers have a central role in instilling values and practicing Islamic teachings in schools. They are expected to be able to instill values of tolerance in the learning process and to be able to form a flexible and not rigid attitude in practicing the teachings of their religion but not sacrificing faith. Through a good internalization process, students are expected to be able to articulate religious teachings well, namely Islamic teachings that promote openness, brotherhood, benefit, but not radical Islamic teachings (Karni, 2020, p. 72). Through this framework, the subjects of Islamic Religious Education taught in schools can still be used as the main means of instilling the value of Islamic moderation through the construction of pluralist-multiculturalist Islamic education (Hermawan, 2020, p. 36). Through several efforts that have been made, Islamic religious education teachers have been able to introduce the concept of religious moderation in elementary schools smoothly.

It should be emphasized here that the implementation of moderation values at the elementary school level and the emphasis on moderation values in schools are not only in Islamic religious education subjects, but also the school must familiarize good attitudes, mutual respect for differences, Islamic religious education teachers and others become role models, showing moderation in their daily lives, so that students get role models (Chadidjah et al., 2021, p. 122). It should be added here that education is the cornerstone of hope for strengthening just character values, mutual respect and appreciation of differences, and a moderate attitude (Mukhibat et al., 2024).

It is worth mentioning that one of the goals and benefits of promoting religious moderation in Indonesia is to prevent a radicalized understanding of Islam that could lead to extremism and endanger the security of the country. Thus, religious moderation in Indonesia is an effort to anticipate radicalism because moderate Islam is the most suitable for Indonesia which has diversity. Religious moderation is important for students in the school environment and students at the campus level as the next generation to advance the nation in the future, instilling moderate Islamic values needs to be pursued as an effort to prevent exposure to radicalism (Rofik & Misbah, 2021, p. 234). Islamic religious education has a strategic capacity to counter to various troubles in religious life, involving the problem of radicalism

that still dominates the lives of religious societies in Indonesia. Hence, as an establishment, Islamic religious education needs to be empowered to stop the stream of radicalism (Arifin, 2016: 94).

From the description above, it can be seen that these teachers have various stories and experiences regarding the efforts they have made in order to instill the concept and values of religious moderation. Their experiences are not the same as each other, but they share the same spirit of disseminating the concepts of religious moderation and tolerance to create a generation that has a strong faith, good morals and a tolerant attitude. This study certainly does not intend to make generalizations. Every teacher who did not participate in this study may have their own way that is different from what is presented in this study.

4. *The teachers' obstacle in instilling religious moderation*

Teachers have made different efforts in the framework of teaching the concept and instilling the values of religious moderation to their students in the classroom. The majority of teachers, as mentioned in the results section, have encountered various obstacles. It should be emphasized here that, in all lines, these obstacles will always appear. In the use of the term religious moderation itself, there are still many contradictions even from among Muslim scholars themselves. This is also an obstacle in itself.

Conceptually, the obstacle to the introduction and application of *wasathiyah* Islam, or religious moderation, came also from some groups who criticize the use of the term because of the highly contested concept. Hilmy said that in the context of theological understanding, moderatism is not easy to decipher. The meaning of moderatism varies, depending on the subject and in what background moderatism is understood (Hilmy, 2012, p. 265).

Hilmy identifies the arguments used by Muslims who reject the nomenclature of moderate Islam (*wasathiyah*). First, moderate Islam is considered as obscurity in religion. Theologically, moderate Islam is a middle way Islam, that is, neither leaning towards the West nor leaning towards the East, in other words, rowing between liberalism and literalism and textualism. Second, moderate Islam signifies a weak religious spirit. Moderate Islamic groups are considered not Islamic groups that reflect true Islam. Third, moderatism is seen as typical of the West, which has no theological roots and traditions of thought in Islam. The West is cramming moderatism with the aim of undermining the solidity of Islam. Because, in the view of the groups who do not agree with moderate Islam, Islam does not want any attributions attached to it, such as "conventional Islam", "liberal Islam", "moderate Islam". For them, there is only one Islam as preached by the Prophet Muhammad (Hilmy, 2012, p. 265). It seems that there are still obstacles in the use of the term "religious moderation", namely the disagreement of some parties who still question the validity of the concept of moderation itself.

From the description above, it is clear that although there are a few teachers who claim not to find obstacles, the majority of teachers encounter obstacles in their efforts to inculcate the values of religious moderation. We need to emphasize here, in every struggle there will definitely be obstacles. Obstacles cannot be avoided, but what is important is how we can find a way out. It is necessary to think of a way out to overcome these obstacles creatively.

CONCLUSIONS

The efforts made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia in campaigning for religious moderation in Indonesia seem to have shown results. The obvious response is the emergence of religious moderation houses in several higher education institutions or universities under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs itself. The religious moderation movement in Indonesia has an important role to play in stemming radicalism from flourishing in society. Educational institutions are considered a strategic medium for teaching religious moderation. Through education, religious moderation can be taught through a set of curricula that mainstream tolerance and respect for differences that occur in the midst of society. The dissemination and teaching of religious moderation does not only occur in higher education (universities), but also in primary education, at least it is proven through our research. Most of the teachers who teach Islamic Religious Education subjects are already aware of the importance of teaching religious moderation to students in elementary schools. This awareness arises from the thought that instilling the teachings of religious moderation which emphasizes the aspects of toleration and respect for differences and diversity is important to do early on, namely when children are still young, so that it becomes a strong foundation for children in living their lives later when they grow up and become good citizens in a pluralistic society, such as Indonesia. Although most of the teachers (especially those who took part in this study) have a good understanding of religious moderation, as well as a strong commitment and earnest efforts in teaching religious moderation to their students, it is not enough to support the success of teaching religious moderation in elementary schools. Systematic and effective efforts from the government are needed to address this issue.

This study recommends the need for a serious training to strengthen competencies in religious moderation and its implementation for Islamic religious education teachers in primary schools. These teachers have a key role because they are the ones who will shape the character of students before they continue to the next level of education. One of the shortcomings of this study is that the observation could only be conducted on a small number of teachers, not all teachers, due to time and budget constraints. Another shortcoming of this study is that it focused more on the teacher, not looking at the students who were the objects of the teacher's actions.

In the future, another research needs to be conducted that focuses more on students, as the direct object of the process of introducing religious moderation in elementary schools.

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