



Teachers as Agents of Religious Moderation: A Study on the Use of Islamic Education Textbooks in Madrasah Aliyah

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Abstract

This study examines the textbooks and teachers of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) in the process of transmitting Islamic religious knowledge at Madrasah Aliyah, Manado City. Manado City was chosen as one of the tolerant cities in Indonesia where the majority of the population embraces Christianity, while Muslims are a minority. The focus of this research is teachers' perception of textbooks, religious patterns, and teachers' agency in learning Islamic religious subjects. Qualitative methods through in-depth interviews are used as instruments to collect and analyze research data. The results of this study show that the 2013 PAI Curriculum textbook published by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia is too complex, but not in-depth, so that teachers need to innovate to find teaching resources from the internet. PAI teachers in the city of Manado reject the perception of Madrasah which has been considered as an institution that produces extreme ideas in religion. On the contrary, this study shows religious teachers as agents of religious moderation. Classrooms and teachers become mediators and facilitators for students who gain intolerant-exclusive religious understanding from offline and online recitations. Islamic religious learning in madrasahs in the city of Manado is a mechanism to reduce radicalism by making the classroom an arena for discourse to develop religious moderation in the city of Manado.

Keywords: Textbooks, PAI Teachers, Religious Moderation, Madrasah Aliyah

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji buku ajar dan guru PAI (Pendidikan Agama Islam) dalam proses transmisi keilmuan agama Islam di Madrasah Aliyah Kota Manado. Kota Manado dipilih sebagai salah satu kota toleransi di Indonesia yang mayoritas penduduknya memeluk agama Nasrani, sedangkan muslim minoritas. Fokus penelitian ini adalah persepsi guru terhadap buku ajar, corak keberagaman, keagenan guru dalam pembelajaran mata pelajaran agama Islam. Metode kualitatif melalui wawancara mendalam digunakan sebagai instrumen untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis data penelitian. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa buku ajar PAI Kurikulum 2013 terbitan Kemenag RI terlalu kompleks, tetapi tidak mendalam, sehingga mengharuskan guru berinovasi mencari sumber ajar dari internet. Guru PAI di kota Manado menolak persepsi Madrasah yang selama ini dianggap sebagai lembaga yang memproduksi paham ekstrem dalam beragama. Sebaliknya, dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan guru-guru agama sebagai agen moderasi beragama. Ruang kelas dan guru menjadi mediator dan fasilitator para siswa yang mendapatkan paham keagamaan yang intoleran-eksklusif dari pengajian luring maupun daring. Pembelajaran agama Islam di madrasah-madrasah di kota Manado menjadi mekanisme peredam radikalisme dengan menjadikan kelas sebagai arena diskursus mengembangkan moderasi beragama di kota Manado.

Kata Kunci: Buku Ajar, Guru PAI, Moderasi Beragama, Madrasah Aliyah

INTRODUCTION

Textbooks are a medium for teaching Islamic content in the classroom that contributes to the formation of Islamic cognition understanding.¹ Meanwhile, PAI teachers have the task of

¹ Baderiah Baderiah et al., "Developing Islamic Education and Local Culture Textbooks," *Al-Ishlah: Journal of Education* 14, no. 3 (2022): 3149–58.

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transferring knowledge, providing teaching and guidance related to students' religious attitudes with textbooks as one of the instruments in teaching.² However, in practice, the existence of textbooks shows that it has not been able to answer the needs of students in living Islamic values. The textbooks still focus on the doctrinal and theological aspects rather than morals and ethics.³ PAI learning, in general, is considered to have not contributed positively to increasing tolerance and a culture of peace for students.⁴ In practice, students are always directed to mastering the texts contained in the textbook. The PAI learning process is dominated by cognitive mastery rather than substance and practice in real life, especially in the practice of tolerance for diversity.⁵ The content of PAI material in the 2013 Curriculum is suspected to be doctrinal, lacks respect for diversity, and is limited in encouraging harmonious interaction between religious communities.⁶

A number of previous studies have shown that teachers have an important role as agents of religious moderation. Nazilah et al.'s research, highlights how Islamic Religious Education teachers build moderation through dialogue-based teaching strategies and case studies. Their findings suggest that a good teacher understanding of religious moderation allows the value of tolerance to be integrated in the classroom, although the limitations of training and teaching materials are often a major obstacle.⁷ This study shows a direct correlation between teacher competence and the effectiveness of the dissemination of moderation values. Meanwhile, Hanif emphasized the importance of moderation education for prospective PAI teachers through a case study of moderation literacy in higher education institutions. The results of his research show that the integration of religious moderation literacy into the curriculum of prospective teachers is able to increase their pedagogical readiness.⁸ However, success in learning practice is largely determined by the availability of relevant teaching materials, including textbooks. Thus, this study shows that teacher readiness and completeness of learning facilities are prerequisites for internalizing the value of moderation.

A number of other studies also examined the content of Islamic Religious Education textbooks. A content analysis conducted on PAI textbooks at the secondary school level found that although the cognitive aspects were in accordance with the curriculum, the presentation

² Rafika Maherah, "The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Religious Attitudes in Students," *At-Ta'lim: Islamic Education Information Media* 19, no. 1 (2020): 209–32.

³ Ira Suryani et al., "Concept Map of Theological Terminology and the Scope of Moral Faith Studies," *Islam & Contemporary Issues* 1, no. 1 (2021): 11–22.

⁴ M. Abdul Fattah Santoso dan Yayah Khisbiyah, "Islam-based peace education: Values, program, reflection and implication," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 1 (2021): 185–207.

⁵ "Mapping The Ideological Spectrum of Islamic Education Textbooks and Teachers at Islamic High Schools,".

⁶ "Mapping The Ideological Spectrum of Islamic Education Textbooks and Teachers at Islamic High Schools."

⁷ Siti Rohmatin Nazilah dkk., "Promoting Religious Tolerance through Islamic Education: Implementing Moderation Values in the Classroom," *PALAPA* 12, no. 2 (2024): 120–39.

⁸ Mohammad Abu Hanif, "Effectiveness of Teaching-Learning Activities of Religious and Moral Education at Secondary Level" (PhD Thesis, \copyright University of Dhaka, 2024), <http://reposit.library.du.ac.bd:8080/xmlui/handle/123456789/3024>.

of the values of tolerance and pluralism still varied.⁹ Most textbooks tend to be normative and have not fully provided pedagogical guidance that encourages a moderate attitude.¹⁰ This finding is important, because textbooks are the main instrument used by teachers in teaching religion as well as a means of internalizing socio-religious values.¹¹ Other broader studies, such as those published through ResearchGate, see teachers as agents of religious moderation in the context of multicultural Indonesia. The study confirms that teachers not only play the role of delivering material, but also as models of moderate attitudes that students imitate.¹² The success of this role depends on the teacher's personal attitude, the support of the educational institution, and the quality of the teaching materials available. This emphasizes the importance of the relationship between teachers, educational contexts, and teaching materials in building religious moderation.

In addition, various studies on the implementation of moderation values in schools and madrassas emphasize the role of national policies and teacher training programs. However, the findings of the study show that the effectiveness of such policies is highly dependent on local adaptation, including the cultural context and characteristics of the surrounding community. In the context of Manado, which is known for its religious diversity, similar research is still limited. Existing studies highlight more the practice of learning beliefs or the effectiveness of certain methods, such as simulation in improving moral understanding in the Manado MAN Model. However, these studies have not specifically highlighted the role of Madrasah Aliyah teachers in utilizing PAI textbooks to instill the value of moderation.

For this reason, the role of PAI teachers and textbooks needs to be encouraged to be more creative and innovative to answer increasingly complex social challenges and changes. Various problems of diversity related to the issues of intolerance, exclusivity, and extremism can actually be one of the main points of teaching in PAI. Students can understand and appreciate the philosophy of religious life that emphasizes moderation, inclusivity and tolerance in interfaith relations. This is an important note to revive the values of diversity in the school environment or madrasah so that PAI teachers become agents of moderation of attitudes and understanding of Islam, not the other way around. On that basis, this paper will review the perception of PAI teachers on the content of textbook materials under the Ministry of Religion (Kemenag) and how PAI teachers at Madrasah Aliyah use the textbooks in classroom learning. The focus of this research is to examine the perception of PAI teachers towards textbooks and religious patterns of PAI Madrasah Aliyah teachers in Manado City. The city of Manado was chosen as one of the tolerant cities in Indonesia where the majority of the

⁹ Ida Zahara Adibah dan Uswatun Chasanah, "Developing a pai curriculum that is responsive to diversity," *At Turots: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2025, 232–40.

¹⁰ Huong Thi Dieu Nguyen, "From textbook adoption to implementation: investigating teacher agency amid educational reform in Vietnam" (PhD Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2024), <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/items/131418>.

¹¹ Muallimul Huda, "Incorporating the Value of Religious Moderation in Islamic Education Learning," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 8, no. 1 (2024): 221–35.

¹² Ahmad Samed Al-Adwan dkk., "Unlocking future learning: Exploring higher education students' intention to adopt meta-education," *Heliyon* 10, no. 9 (2024), [https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440\(24\)05575-0](https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440(24)05575-0).

population embraces Christianity.¹³ Among minorities, PAI religious teachers play an important role in reducing radicalism and shaping the attitudes and religious patterns of students who are moderate, inclusive and tolerant.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method, with data mining techniques in the form of in-depth interviews accompanied by observations to gain an understanding of teachers' perspectives, usage, and innovation of textbooks, and about teachers' religious patterns.¹⁴ In addition to aiming to dig up personal and deep information, in-depth interviews also serve to uncover the biographical narrative of informants and reveal sensitive information in addition to obtaining a diversity of teachers' perspectives. The interview was conducted by ensuring the representation of public-private madrasahs, the four subjects, and gender. This study interviewed 16 PAI teachers as important informants to explore the data.¹⁵ The interview informants were selected based on the criteria of their role as PAI teachers. The interview process was carried out by visiting resource persons (PAI teachers) in six Madrasahs; MAN Model Manado, MA Assalam Manado, MA Darul Istiqomah, MA Pondok Karya Development, MA Al-Muhajirin, and MA Al-Khaerat. The understanding of each informant is explored through his or her psychosocial disposition, which is a dynamic blend of personal life history, and the results of social interactions that he or she has in the family and the wider environment, such as schools, study groups, media and networks followed, as well as the community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The portrait of diversity taught in the context of social relations of Madrasah Aliyah students in Manado City can show how the role of PAI teachers and textbooks in multicultural life in the city of Manado. Unlike in other cities, the State Aliyah Madrasah in Manado has only one school. The number of Aliyah Madrasah in this city is relatively limited. There are four Madrasah Aliyah (MA) besides MAN; MA Al-Muhajirin, MA Assalam, MA Darul Istiqomah, MA Pondok Karya Pembangunan (PKP) and MA Alkhaerat and MA Madani. The results of this study are important to photograph Islamic education in Islamic educational institutions in Muslim minority cities.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia PAI Textbook

Based on interviews, several things were found related to teachers' perceptions of PAI textbooks. All PAI teachers received socialization that the textbooks published by the Ministry of Religion (Kemenag) are official materials for teaching Islamic religious lessons. Most schools

¹³ Keren E. Manaroinson et al., "Manado Christian Community Center. Architectural Symbolism" (PhD Thesis, Sam Ratulangi University, 2017), <https://www.neliti.com/publications/177970/manado-christian-community-center-arsitektur-simbolisme>.

¹⁴ John W. Creswell dan Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

¹⁵ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif* (Alfabeta, 2017).

use Islamic Religious Education (PAI) literature published by the Ministry of Religion (Kemenag) which consists of teacher handbooks and student books covering the subjects of (1) *Moral Faith*, (2) *Al-Qur'an Hadith*, (3) *Fiqh*, and (4) *Islamic Cultural History*. Private publishers used by PAI teachers other than the Ministry of Religion publications are Erlangga, Aneka Ilmu, CV. Arya Duta. The PAI textbooks used in Indonesia since 2014 are the result of the 2013 curriculum changes. The 1994 Curriculum and the 2006 KTSP Curriculum are considered by most informants to be ideal teaching materials for PAI compared to K13, for the reasons: *First*, the PAI K13 book contains good and complete material, but it is not in-depth. Teachers who use the PAI K13 book stated that this book is very complex. This lack opens up opportunities for teachers to look for other sources from the internet as quoted below:

"I personally still use the PAI textbook published by Erlangga in 2008 because it is more complete and in-depth than the Ministry of Religion's book. The Ministry of Religion's book does require teachers and students to work hard to patch up based on independent search through the internet and additional sources. This is both good and risky for schools whose literacy access or facilities are inadequate due to various problems".¹⁶

The above quote is one example of a common response from the research informants. Another teacher completed the explanation that the teaching materials of the Ministry of Religion added a huge weight to the teaching and showed a prominent national orientation. As explained by a Head of the Supreme Court, the teaching materials of the Ministry of Religion tend to form a democratic understanding. This confirms the findings of previous research which stated that the 2013 Curriculum has a very high acceptance of democratic values.

"I teach the Qur'an Hadith, most of all, there is a difference between the Ministry of Religion's textbooks under K13 and the previous PAI textbooks. I personally prefer the 1994 curriculum because it is complete and in-depth. I feel that there is a tendency in K13 that emphasizes tolerance and democracy. The orientation of the teaching material does not focus on the formation of knowledge but on tolerance. As a companion to the K13 Victory book, I also use the KTSP 2006 book".¹⁷

Second, in other cases, the acceptance of PAI K13 books is uneven. This is because the government no longer prints this book physically. The main problem for teachers is that they do not intend to spend more resources to print the large variety of books used, as well as other supporting materials. The position of PAI teachers is mostly honorary, so they don't have much choice to print PAI K13 books available online. The unavailability of PAI K13 books in print makes teachers use teaching materials that are already available in the school library. Most of these teaching materials are 2006 and 1994/1999 curriculum books. The perception of the difficulty of using the PAI K13 book is also about the physical availability of this book. Another problem conveyed by the informants is that the PAI K13 book is revised too often, making it difficult for them to adapt to the new content. Although not all, some of these PAI teachers encountered obstacles to adjust the changes to the PAI K13 Book with conditions in the field that were not too dynamic.

¹⁶ Interview with PAI teacher in Fiqh study class XI MIPA and XI Social Studies at MAN Model Manado

¹⁷ Interview with PAI teacher in the field of Al-Qur'an Hadith study MAN Model Manado

Third, the historical or statistical data used in the PAI K13 book is wrong, making teachers have to verify the information independently. The explanation was delivered by one of the teachers of Islamic Cultural History at MAN Model Manado. According to him, the year and location in the explanation of historical material must be checked often because there are mistakes. As well as the findings made by the researcher on SKI teaching materials that incorrectly included names in the captions of the figures' photos and the year of the event. In addition to data errors, there is also a lack of depth in the discussion for the history of Islam in Indonesia.

"Most of the time we talk about the development of Islam in the world. No update of the latest data. For example, the development of Europe, Africa, mosque data, Islamic organizations in the world, Muslim figures who play a role in the world, data on Muslim populations. Meanwhile, children are now critical, finding from other sources. Teachers always cross-check, so as not to make mistakes. Referring to a book can be wrong. The history of Islam in Indonesia is even less comprehensive. But that's okay, we develop ourselves. Even the exam questions in the book did not come out."¹⁸

In addition, the respondents above also stated that the material for class XII was too dense with limited time availability. On the other hand, there is too little SKI material in classes X and XI which actually has a long time available for deepening. Other PAI teachers also expressed the same perception. PAI K13 books are not systematized and integrated with diverse learning processes in various different school situations and conditions. The PAI K13 book does not seem to blend with the rhythm of the applied learning system. This is an important issue that must be managed by the Ministry of Religion. Fourth, in general, teachers do not agree with the assumption that religious subjects are boring, but it depends on the teacher. "What makes the child boring depends on the teacher who conveys, it does not have to be monotonous and does not have to be all from the teacher, sometimes we interact with the child, there are times when we have to make the child aware with lectures depending on the situation" (MDOGN1).

Innovation of PAI Madrasah Aliyah Teachers in Manado City in Learning

As the perception of PAI teachers that religious lessons are not boring, teachers make efforts to innovate learning referring to the strategies used by PAI teachers as a process of reconstructing religious insight to students. Learning innovations include ideas, instruments, and implementation as well as evaluation that are continuously driven by relational dynamics between teachers and students. The 2013 curriculum demands a large portion of teachers to develop active learning. Not all PAI teachers are ready with the way the 2013 Curriculum works. Moreover, this system cannot be fully maximized, especially in areas with limited learning facilities. In the research, it was found that teachers generally view the textbooks published by the Ministry of Religion as "quite good" (to say not good), some stated "incomplete", "not in-depth", or "not detailed". But what needs to be underlined here is that the textbook is designed with the 2013 curriculum in mind, using the principles of search-

¹⁸ Interview with PAI teacher in the field of Islamic Cultural History at MAN Model Manado

based scientific learning. Learning requires students and teachers alike to actively seek learning resources other than those in the classroom, so inevitably teachers must be creative and innovative.

In Manado, the learning innovation of PAI teachers is highly dependent on the academic background of PAI teachers, whether they come from relevant academic backgrounds or not. This academic background is also largely supported by the level of undergraduate education they have undergone. Teachers with an S1 academic background need extra energy in designing innovative learning. Especially if they do not have a wide background of social activities.

"I teach not only with the K13 Ministry of Religion book, but there are several other publishers. I usually use books from Aneka Ilmu. There is also a book from Erlangga Publisher. Compared to K13, the 2008 KTSP is clearer and more directed. KTSP is more systematic. Teachers are easy to adjust. The Ministry of Religion's book from a technical point of view is also not easy. Not all teachers master Arabic terms. For Fiqh, there are many Arabic terms. So teachers must open the internet or Arabic dictionary. Another technicality, the materials often overlap in Fiqh. Our overlapping material refers to the syllabus".¹⁹

In the researcher's research, there are at least two main sources other than textbooks that are used as references for PAI teachers in Manado City. *First*, PAI literature available in the market such as: *Akidah Akhlak Kelas 9* published by Aneka Ilmu, in 2005; *Akidah Akhlak* published by Erlangga in 2017; *The Complete Book of the History of Islamic Civilization* by Abdul Syukur al-Azizi published by Saufa in 2014; *Tafsir Al-Misbah* Quraish Shihab; Shirley Scott; *Fiqh Sunnah* Sayyid Sabiq. *Second*, the internet is used as a secondary source of learning. Teachers obtain learning support materials by utilizing the *Google search engine*. The internet also serves as an alternative source to get around the complexity of the material in the textbooks published by the Ministry of Religion. Most teachers don't have website-specific referrals. The internet plays the role of a source of reading and assignments for students. The internet has a unique role in the formation of religious understanding. PAI teachers use *Youtube* as a video channel to watch religious lectures, motivational videos, and religious issues.

Textbooks do not really influence the ideological spectrum of students. Because the role of teachers in improvising and innovating teacher materials is very large. Revised books do not necessarily guarantee the elimination of religious radicalism. In fact, learning resources are more available on websites, youtube (internet) and books in the popular Islamism genre. The use of the 2013 curriculum PAI book published by Kemenang for various fields of study in Manado is uneven. The main problem is that the PAI book officially published by the Ministry of Religion was only printed once, namely the 2014 edition. The informants gave three different answers about the users of the PAI book, as well as those found at other research sites. First, teachers who use the Ministry of Religion's PAI book as the main reference, are equipped with other relevant religious literature. Second, teachers only use PAI literature available in school libraries, most of which are set in the 2006 and 1994/1999 curriculum. Third, religious teachers use PAI books that match their teaching experience. These three patterns of use of PAI

¹⁹ Interview with PAI teacher in Fiqh study class X and XII at MAN Model Manado

books represent different appropriation tendencies, formed by teaching experience and the competence of the scientific community. Teachers with more than 20 years of teaching experience generally choose the 2006 curriculum. Meanwhile, teachers with a range of teaching experience of 3 to 10 years consider the 2013 Curriculum to be relatively adequate to use.

Meanwhile, the character of the supporting books used varies based on the publisher and curriculum as well as the nature of the curriculum or supplement. The informant used books published by the Ministry of Religion, Erlangga, Aneka Ilmu, and CV. Arya Ambassador. Each book refers differently to the 2013 Curriculum, the 2006 Curriculum, and the 1994/1999 Curriculum. Supporting books are curricular, namely PAI textbooks in addition to the Ministry of Religion's publications, informants, for example, use PAI KTSP textbooks. Then supporting books that are supplements include religious literature such as *Tafsir Al-Misbah*, *Riyadhussalihin*, *Fiqh Sunnah*, and others.

The Pattern of Religious Diversity of PAI Teachers in Manado City

In explaining the religious pattern of PAI teachers in the city of Manado, three concepts of religious understanding and insight were found in the field, namely: *ukhuwah Islamiyah*, *ukhuwah wathoniyah*, and *ukhuwah basyariyah*.²⁰ These three components represent the difference in the orientation of social attachment understood by each informant. *First*, *ukhuwah Islamiyah* can be used to explain the orientation of social cohesion based on common identity. Solidarity between fellow Muslims is considered as evidence of the success of intra-identity identification. *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* explains why between fellow Muslims of different madhhabs they try to be tolerant and not for religious differences. The concept of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* will provide an alternative explanation for why ambivalence arises in terms of pluralistic awareness of PAI teachers.

Second, *Ukhuwah Wathoniyah* explains social cohesion based on awareness of the similarities of ethnicity, ethnicity, and nation. *Ukhuwah wathoniyah* is a form of communality built in national awareness. The concept of *ukhuwah wathoniyah* will explain why informants consider it very important to maintain peace under the narrative of nationalism.²¹ *Ukhuwah wathoniyah* will explain why religious attitudes combined with nationalism have become a trend in recent times, especially with the state's active entry into religious discourse through control of social institutions and authorities. The last is *the basyariyah ukhuwah* which is used to explain the position of progressive Muslims. *Ukhuwah basyariyah* provides the basis for why a number of informants put the element of humanity as the dominant paradigm in interreligious relations. *Ukhuwah Basyariyah* explained about the models of interfaith solidarity as a multicultural awareness that is practiced continuously.

²⁰ Makhfud Syawaludin, "MULTICULTURAL UKHUWAH CONCEPT: The Study of Various Signification on Ukhuwah Perspective of Islamic Elite Religion in Pasuruan District," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 20, no. 1 (2020).

²¹ Tsulis A. Zahri dkk., "The narrative of ukhuwah wathaniyah as nasionalisme project based on sustainable development," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 716, no. 1 (2021): 012098, <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1755-1315/716/1/012098/meta>.

Conservative in Faith, Moderate in Practice

PAI teachers in the city of Manado have a high acceptance of democracy and multicultural life. They generally agree that harmonious social relations across religions and cultures are the key to the success of building a society. Most of them also believe that inter-religious harmony is an important capital for Indonesia to get through times full of conflict. They define social life as the fusion and interaction between various people from diverse social, religious, and cultural backgrounds. The informants revealed that in their daily lives they lived with people who were of Christian origin.

Their relationship is at least in line with eight meaningful interaction models, namely: (1) visiting each other between families; (2) coming to a wedding; (3) meeting during public events/festivals; (4) come to a funeral or visit a grieving family; (5) coming to the family thanksgiving/celebration event; (6) go to eat together; (7) childhood experiences with people of other religions; (8) his family has social relations with people of different religions. In this study, the researcher added an additional point, namely, meaningful interaction is caused by kinship relationships. For example, some of these PAI teachers have in-laws from Christianity. They strive to keep this relationship harmonious and long-term.

The eight meaningful interactions imply a moderate model of religious social practice. Nevertheless, PAI teachers treat religious texts as closed doctrines.²² For example, they alternately define people of religions other than Islam as "non-Muslims", "Infidels", or "People next door", and define themselves as "upright", "guided", and "pious". The term "Infidels" is treated as a closed doctrine because it is understood assumptively, i.e. "people who are not Muslims". In fact, in Islamic teachings the word *kafara* can refer to anyone who is considered to deviate from God's commands. The implication is that they place the use of the word "infidel" when the context is in a tone of rejection or resistance. For example, when they declare that they do not want to have a president from a religious background other than Islam or when they explain their dislike for doctrine. These tones of rejection are intricately intertwined with narratives of disillusionment with the state and feelings of discrimination. Researchers must carefully sort out the conservative tone caused by theological clashes and economic-political issues.

In the context of Manado, it is not true that theological conservatism has a causal relationship with extremism or radicalism.²³ The fact is that most of these PAI teachers are theologically very conservative puritans in Bruinessen's terms, and fundamentalists, but have harmonious social relations with their Christian colleagues.²⁴ They grow up socially with people from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds. This relationship is thus combined with political and social hierarchy issues. Teachers think it is okay to wish a Merry Christmas,

²² Imam Tabroni dkk., "The role of the pai teacher in implementing the values of inter-religious tolerance in students," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Madani* 2, no. 2 (2022): 779–86.

²³ Jannes E. Sirait, "Post-conservative: A proposal for theological polarisation in Indonesia," *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024), <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/hts/article/view/287497>.

²⁴ Martin van Bruinessen, "In the tradition or outside? Reflections on teachers and influences," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015): 53.

especially if it is for reasons of politeness. They say it is permissible to say to a Christian superior, or to an in-laws as a form of respect for parents.

Not only in interreligious relations, but also for the issue of piety they treat closed doctrine. For example, PAI teachers stated that wearing a hijab is mandatory for all Muslim women. They consider the piety of a Muslim woman to be marked by the use of the hijab. Their reason is the hijab as a "moral fortress". Most informants stated that by wearing a hijab, a woman shows a high commitment to the teachings of Islam. On the other hand, they tolerate a woman who does not wear a hijab. They consider it a process towards the inauguration of carrying out religious orders. An informant said, "The hijab is the price of death, the order. A Muslim woman should be obliged to wear a hijab. Even if covering the *aurat* is not in the material. I inserted it in the material. For those who are not yet perfect, wearing the hijab is a process" (MDOGN7). Interestingly, when asked about the phenomenon of artists wearing hijab, she showed a happy but critical attitude. He argued that the phenomenon of artists wearing hijab is only a sensation, *hijrah* but still posting old photos that are not hijab. Towards the phenomenon of young women who wear veils, she also seems less appreciative, according to her veil but still taking selfies, wearing jeans but veiling. So according to him, the veil is a trend.

The informant also added that the issue of jihad should be treated as an open doctrine. Not trapped in the context of the verses or stories of war that have been attached to the concept of jihad. According to him, people should be careful in defining the meaning of jihad because of the plural nature of diction (fighting in the way of Allah sincerely and earnestly). He revealed that jihad also includes earnestly improving the welfare of the family. He stated that "do not da'wah or jihad outside but his wife is left outside".²⁵

The tendency of the pattern of religious insight of PAI teachers in Manado confirms the pragmatic moderate thesis. If you pay attention, the socio-religious background of this informant is an Aisyiyah activist. She admitted that her husband was a "hard" Muhammadiyah her husband was the Chairman of IMM (Muhammadiyah Student Association) when he was the Chairman of IMMawati IMM Bitung. Conservatism of faith and moral moderation were seen when the informant responded to the issue of "wishing you a Merry Christmas". According to him, it is permissible to wish a Merry Christmas as a form of social solidarity but on the condition that it be changed to the sentence "Happy Celebration". This informant had a Christian family. He regularly calls to say "happy celebration". He believes that by doing this his faith will not waver at all.

The cases and narratives presented above show the upheaval of awareness of social cohesion based on nationality (*ukhuwah wathoniyah*) and humanity (*ukhuwah basyariyah*). This is driven mainly by the positive acceptance of the discourse of nationalism and humanism. It should be noted that the informants of this study show an ambivalence between being tolerant and pluralist as well as exclusive. They consider that cross-religious help is absolutely necessary. The practice of helping will be higher if it involves kinship relations. Research informants are accustomed to visiting Christian neighbors or acquaintances who are grieving. They visit Christian relatives who are sick or afflicted by disasters while offering help. In

²⁵ Interview with PAI teacher in Fiqh study class XI and XII at MAN Model Manado

certain contexts, religious background is very much considered to decide the priority of assistance.

Conservative Tolerance VS Progressive Tolerance

This study describes two forms of tolerance ideology. *The first* is conservative tolerance, referring to the application of theological doctrine in a closed but fully committed to socially harmonious life.²⁶ *The second* is progressive tolerance, referring to an open interpretation of theological doctrine, while actively involved in the formation of an open society. The research informants were mostly in the first category. They are teachers who believe that closed religious doctrine should not hinder interfaith life. They hold that Islam is the most correct teaching. They also believe that there is no form of God worthy of worship other than Allah SWT. This kind of theological doctrine becomes closed when faced with the fact that the theological framework is closely related to the history of a religion and the social conflicts that contribute to the dominant construction of interpretation of religious texts (e.g., the division between Sunni and Shia interpretations of monotheism).

The implication of the closed doctrine is the identification of patent solidarity with fellow believers. For example, they consider that interreligious harmony is important, but the majority must still be in control. They agree if multicultural sustainability exists, but reject if symbols of domination are held by people from other religious backgrounds. They do not want Indonesia to be led by a Christian president assuming that the Muslim community is the majority in the country.

Conservative tolerance is also shown by a lack of interest in paying attention to the theological diversity of the teachings of other religions.²⁷ Teachers who fall into this first category not only do not campaign for tolerance openly in the public space, but also do not actively try to make tolerance a discourse in religious spaces. They rarely talk about or educate the listeners of their pulpit about the importance of understanding the doctrinal differences between religions. Under certain conditions, they suggest the importance of remaining exclusive to the younger generation of Muslims because they are worried about the unstable faith. They set a firm limit on relations between young people. While it may seem common for a young Muslim to date or marry a Christian, this is certainly not openly recommended. The informant admitted that in Islam there are doctrines that cannot be negotiated, especially those that are directly related to the faith. Those who approve of interfaith marriage consider that this method can be a way to Islamize someone. On the other hand, those who reject interfaith marriage are worried that it will become a means of apostasy, especially for Muslim women.

Instead of being a progressive tolerant, they treat theological doctrine openly and readily criticize. This kind of position is clearly a minor narrative in the study's findings.²⁸ Teachers in this position consider that Islam must be an open teaching when faced with issues of humanity and interfaith solidarity. For example, they do not question a leader's Christian background on

²⁶ Steven D. Smith, "The restoration of tolerance," *Calif. L. Rev.* 78 (1990): 305.

²⁷ Ehsan Kandil, "The Relationship between Religions and Tolerance," *International Journal of Humanities and Language Research* 6, no. 2 (2023): 1–14.

²⁸ Mary Jo Hatch, "The Role of the Researcher: An Analysis of Narrative Position in Organization Theory," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 5, no. 4 (1996): 359–74, <https://doi.org/10.1177/105649269654011>.

the condition of competence and good social capital with Muslims. In the context of national leadership they will continue to be ambivalent and ambiguous, but firm for the context of local leadership. There is indeed a sociological context behind why they accept being led by a Christian in a local context and not in a national context. Informants are teachers who live in a multicultural society. They are accustomed to minority positions economically and politically and have a harmonious experience of coexistence, influencing relative acceptance of tolerant attitudes.

Progressive tolerance is very minor in the narratives of research informant practices. Nevertheless, they have an agreement on the importance of maintaining social harmony.²⁹ They do not want open and horizontal conflicts in the social life they live. They choose to prioritize safe and peaceful conditions rather than arguing over theological issues. In such circumstances, teachers' understanding is in a position of progressive tolerance. They strongly advocate democratic mechanisms and rely on the law to resolve tensions between religious groups. This can be seen for example in their efforts to pioneer a peaceful path in a number of conflict cases. The informant stated that they always prioritize dialogue.

In the last five years, Manado has experienced a number of cases of interfaith conflict. *First*, there is the case of the stabbing of a pig's head on a mosque building in Bitung which has a wide impact on Manado. *Second*, there is a case that occurred related to the issue of apostasy in Wori. *Third*, the case of the establishment of a house of worship for the Pentecostal Christian group that faced Muslims and Catholics. These three cases stand out among a number of potential conflicts between villages that are loaded with religious sentiments. The ability of the security forces to handle and the active role of religious leaders have succeeded in reducing the tension of the conflict. The informants explained that the discourse of tolerance that is built at all times will not be able to reduce the conflict without the intervention of the state and civil groups.³⁰

PAI Teachers as Agents of Religious Moderation

PAI teachers in the city of Manado reject the perception of Madrasah which has been considered as an institution that produces exclusive, intolerant and extreme beliefs in religion. Religious education is considered to contribute to shaping individuals in radicalism and extremism. On the contrary, this study shows that religious teachers are described as agents who teach moderate religious understanding and religious tolerance. This finding is in line with Mark Woodward who denies any link between Islamic education in Indonesia and radicalism and extremism. In fact, Islamic schools function as a vehicle for moderating students' religious understanding. Classrooms and teachers become mediators and facilitators for students who gain an intolerant-exclusive religious understanding obtained from participating in online and offline recitation groups. Although they are mostly on the spectrum of conservative tolerance ideologies, they often take an important role in introducing moderate and tolerant Islam. They strive to facilitate inclusive understanding, especially in the

²⁹ Tri Susanto, "Ethnography of Harmony: Local Traditions and Dynamics of Interfaith Tolerance in Nglinggi Village, Indonesia," *Asian Anthropology* 24, no. 2 (2025): 146–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1683478X.2024.2434988>.

³⁰ Interview with PAI teacher in the field of Al-Qur'an Hadith study MAN Model Manado

classroom. In Madrasah PAI teachers do not encourage students to directly confront differences in religious doctrine with adherents of other teachings. They suggest to maintain a harmonious relationship.

One of the important issues that describes this role is for example the topic of jihad and the Islamic state. PAI teachers agree that the meaning of the term jihad is very broad, not related to the war against the infidels. In class they receive in-depth discussions on the topic of Jihad. A teacher of Fiqh stated that jihad is not an armed war or violence, but a commitment to fight lust. For him, the problem of exclusive religiosity lies in the critical thinking capacity of teachers and students. For example, teachers must have the ability to explain the importance of *asbabun nuzul* of a verse, especially verses that are often used to legitimize violence in the name of religion. According to him, the issue of an Islamic state is not the main orientation, but the irrelevant application of Islamic sharia will become a problem for multicultural and multireligious societies. For him, democracy as a political system is still an important alternative to maintain a conducive climate.³¹

From this, it can be said that what is vulnerable to the discourse of extremism and intolerance is religious understanding outside of school through the process of popular Islamization.³² This is as stated by previous research by *the Center for The Study of Religion and Culture*, that religious education in formal schools has not been able to answer the religious education needs of young Muslims and has not been optimal in fortifying them from the current of conservatism.³³ One of the impacts is that young Muslims are looking for additional learning resources to meet their religious knowledge needs outside of school, including through social media. They have not been able to sort out and choose where and what kind of media will lead to their religious patterns. However, in the context of Manado, Islamic education in madrassas has become a mechanism to reduce radicalism by making the classroom a space for discourse to develop Islamic moderation. The limitations of textbook materials, which are considered to be less in-depth, are actually an opportunity for PAI teachers in the city of Manado to find online resources from the internet, and in the classroom PAI teachers become mediators and facilitators of discussions on Islamic topics, so as to make students accustomed to the diversity of religious understandings.

In the context of PAI teachers in the city of Manado, although they are generally conservative, because they live as a Muslim minority, they are sociologically accustomed to interacting with followers of other religions, thus making them tolerant. This emphasizes how important it is that spaces of encounter with different religions, cultures and tribes can give birth to intersubjective religious patterns born from the aspect of empirical experience, thus giving birth to an attitude of empathy, sympathy, tolerance and mutual understanding of each other. To create an attitude of tolerance, in addition to the need for multicultural literacy, social spaces are also needed that dissolve theological, doctrinal and prejudiced barriers.

³¹ Interview with PAI teacher in Fiqh study class X and XII at MAN Model Manado

³² Friedrich Schweitzer, "Religious Individualization: New Challenges to Education for Tolerance," *British Journal of Religious Education* 29, no. 1 (2007): 89–100, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200601037551>.

³³ Abdullah Sahin, "Critical issues in Islamic education studies: Rethinking Islamic and Western liberal secular values of education," *Religions* 9, no. 11 (2018): 335.

Teachers and textbooks in religious learning are one of the keys to how the process of students build their religious knowledge. Furthermore, religious knowledge will affect the perspective of students and affect how their religious practices are practiced, their relationships in social life, and their views as Muslims in the life of the nation and state.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study conclude on two things, namely the perception of PAI teachers towards the PAI textbook and the role of teacher agencies in innovating learning methods and teaching materials for knowledge systems and attitudes of religious moderation. The perception of PAI teachers at Madrasah Alilayah in Manado city towards the 2013 PAI Curriculum textbook published by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia considers the content of Islamic teaching to be too complex and broad, but not in-depth. This opens up space, even requiring PAI teachers to innovate to find teaching resources from the internet. In the city of Manado, PAI teachers reject the perception of Madrasah which has been considered as an institution that contributes to the production of extreme ideas and radicalism in religion. On the contrary, this study shows religious teachers as agents of religious moderation. Classrooms and teachers become mediators and facilitators for students who gain intolerant-exclusive religious understanding from offline and online recitations. In other words, Islamic religious learning in madrassas in the city of Manado has been able to become a mechanism to reduce radicalism and extremism by making the classroom an arena for discourse to develop religious moderation understandings and attitudes. The author is grateful to various parties who supported the research funding of this article, especially to the Center for Cultural Studies and Social Change (PSBPS) of the University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) which received funding from the Center for Islamic and Social Studies (PPIM) UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta through the CONVEY research project. In addition to funding support, no less important is intellectual support in the form of methodological input and perspectives that can enrich the analysis of research results.

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