

Building Character Through Religious Moderation: A Case Study of SMAN 8 South Konawe, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the integration of Islamic culture and religious moderation at State High School (SMAN) 8 South Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. In the context of Indonesia's diversity, religious moderation is expected to build tolerant and empathetic student characters. This research uses qualitative methods with data collection techniques through interviews, observation and documentation. The research results show that the school implements Islamic values through routine religious activities and interactions between students who respect each other. This religious culture creates an inclusive and harmonious environment, where students from various religious backgrounds can interact positively. Apart from that, implementing values such as Smile, Greetings, Greetings (SGG) and Cleanliness, Health, Beauty, Politeness (CHBP) also strengthens students' character. The principal's democratic leadership style also contributes to student participation in decision making. This research recommends increasing training for teachers, developing extracurricular activities, and parental involvement to strengthen the value of religious moderation. In this way, SMAN 8 South Konawe can be an example in creating an educational environment that is harmonious and supports diversity.

Keywords: Islamic culture, student empathy, religious moderation, tolerance

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that was born with a background of mutually reinforcing diversity. One of these differences is religious and cultural life. It is estimated that mutual encouragement, mutual acceptance and mutual tolerance will make it easier to build national unity. This concept has attracted the interest of many experts in developing it into religious moderation in Indonesia [1]. It is hoped that the concept of religious moderation will be able to lead the nation's children to develop themselves to be strong and able to recognize themselves, their friends, the community and their surrounding environment. Learning to recognize yourself has a noble goal: making peace with yourself and improving yourself so that your quality of life improves. By reflecting on our thoughts and feelings, we can identify weaknesses, appreciate strengths, and take steps for personal growth. Introspection helps us avoid making the same mistakes in the future, so that regrets don't haunt us [2]. The value of external and internal empathy, which is a conceptual derivative of religious moderation from the aspect of tolerance, tends to be vulnerable among students, lecturers and educational staff at three State Religious Universities: UIN Jakarta, UIN Bandung and UIN Yogyakarta. That is, this indicates that a person's empathy for adherents of other religions is relatively low

and rejection of adherents of other sects in Islam such as Ahmadiyah and Shia is relatively high [3].

Islamic culture in schools as defined by (Mumlanah, 2020) [4] as an educational environment that integrates Islamic values in learning and daily interactions. This culture includes: 1) inclusive values, namely encouraging openness and mutual respect between students with different religious backgrounds, 2) humanity, namely respecting plurality and diversity as part of a shared identity, 3) tolerance, namely teaching the importance of mutual respect between religions to prevent divisions, 4) cooperation, namely building the habit of helping and supporting each other in daily activities, and 5) justice, namely ensuring fair treatment for all students regardless of religious background. Islamic culture needs to be built and realized in schools with the aim of creating a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere, as well as forming students' characters with a multicultural perspective. The research results (Azizah, 2023) [5] show that the concept of religious moderation values that exist at SMA Islam Nusantara and SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Malang, includes several things such as: moderate values, fairness, tolerance, honesty, balance, helping each other and others. school community, deliberation and tajdid. The concept in its explanation in schools is applied with a model of continuous introduction of the concept of moderation, habituation methods for students, role models for teachers and figures, formation of student character, school programs, teacher supervision, teacher coaching, and raising student awareness.

Various values of religious moderation that can be applied in school community interactions in public schools as stated by (Gonibala, 2022) [6] include: 1) tawasuth (middle attitude), namely prioritizing a balanced attitude in interactions, not extreme, and maintaining a balance between various aspects of life, 2) i'tidal (perpendicular), namely placing everything in the right proportion, acting objectively, and respecting each other's rights and obligations, 3) tasamuh (tolerance), namely respecting differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and group. Accept and respect diversity as part of life together; 4) shura (deliberation), namely prioritizing discussion and mutual agreement in resolving problems, as well as respecting other people's opinions; 5) qudwah (pioneering), namely being a good example in behavior and attitude, and showing leadership in goodness; 6) la'unf (non-violence), namely encouraging peaceful, friendly and respectful attitudes towards one another, and rejecting all forms of violence; 7) islah (reformative), namely trying to improve situations and relationships between individuals with an open attitude towards criticism and input. These values of religious moderation can be integrated into daily life in schools that have religious and cultural diversity to create an environment of harmony and mutual respect.

This value of religious moderation is also found in the article written by (Saefudin et al., 2023) [7]. The value of religious moderation is adapted from an early age in education effectively, namely 1) from preparing learning plans on appropriate subjects, 2) prioritizing cooperative learning methods that encourage discussion and cooperation between students, so that they can respect each other's differences, 3) involving students to discuss and deliberate in solving problems, so that they can learn to respect other people's opinions, 4) encourage students to internalize the values of religious moderation in everyday life, both at school and outside of school, 5) organize extracurricular activities that can strengthen moderation values, such as social activities or interreligious dialogue, 6) evaluate students' understanding of the value of religious moderation and provide feedback to improve their understanding, and 7) involve parents in the educational process by providing an understanding of the importance of the value of religious moderation. The value of religious moderation in its implementation in public schools where the school population has various nationalities and religions, needs to be supported by creating a friendly environment, reflection and continuous improvement and applying the principle of wasyatiyah (balance), so that schools can create an environment that supports religious moderation, reducing potential conflict, and building a harmonious society [8]. Less interesting research also strengthens the portrait of culture and religion in schools, such as that carried out by (Putra & Zarita, 2022) [9]. This research emphasizes the importance of awareness and religion among students in Kendari City, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. This concept can also be applied to a wider environment as early as possible, such as tolerance, dialogue and rejection of negative extremism in

religion. In addition, it is necessary to develop an open attitude towards cultural diversity in the form of accepting and respecting various cultures and traditions in society, prioritizing positive local values while still respecting other cultures, and implementing a curriculum that reflects cultural diversity to increase awareness and tolerance. Awareness and tolerance become a model of national and religious tolerance and awareness that can be developed and adapted at the general secondary level through extracurricular activities involving various cultures and religions, integration of character education in students' daily lives both inside and outside school, and if necessary providing training and capacity strengthening for teachers about the importance of moderation to be implemented in the classroom.

SMAN 8 South Konawe is a state school and is open to all high school age children who do not differentiate between culture and religion. This school is in Konda Village, Konda District, South Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia, which is 6.7 km from campus of Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari. Islamic culture and religious moderation live in harmony and side by side regularly every day. This is supported by the adequate state of human resources for teachers and education staff, totaling 51 people consisting of 48 Muslims, 1 Christian and 2 Hindus. There are 449 students consisting of 437 Muslims, 10 Christians and 2 Hindus. All school members have diverse cultural backgrounds and draw almost 80% of Indonesian miniatures. Based on this, it is important to carry out a portrait of Islamic cultural life and religious moderation among the residents of SMAN 8 South Konawe. It is hoped that this portrait will contribute to the development of the concept of Islamic culture and religious moderation at SMAN 8 South Konawe in a sustainable manner and can be adapted to other schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in preparing this article uses qualitative research methods [1], [3], [4], [10]–[13]. Data collection techniques using interviews, observation and documentation directly and building interactions with school residents) [14]–[16]. Data collection techniques using interviews, observation and documentation. Data collection was carried out for 22 days, namely 29 July 2024 to 19 August 2024. The participant observation involved in this research were 6 people, 1 male and 5 female, aged in the range 20–21 years. The population observed during this research consisted of 51 teachers and education staff and 449 students at Public Senior High School 8 South Konawe. The samples used to obtain information on Islamic cultural life and religious moderation were school principals and teachers of Islamic Religious Education subjects. Interviews were conducted with the school principal, LOS (name anonymous), male, age 43 years, teacher of Islamic religious education subjects, RRE (name anonymous), female gender, age 52 years. Observations are carried out to observe the activities of school residents and the condition of facilities and infrastructure that support the learning process at school both inside and outside the classroom. Documentation is used to collect written information in the form of reports, artifacts, materials, and data on the condition of students and teachers as well as other learning facilities that support obtaining a portrait of Islamic culture and religious moderation at SMAN 8 South Konawe. Data analysis techniques in this method are used to categorize written or spoken data into categories that have similar patterns. Some data is also developed inductively from raw data without pre-imposing categories, using existing theory or research findings to guide data coding and analysis and data analysis begins by counting words or manifest content, then expanding the meaning and themes contained in the texts found [17].

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The SMAN 8 South Konawe exists in order to meet public needs in providing human resources who have quality and scholarly qualities, have religious, cultural, social insight and preserve the environment. This can be found through the vision and mission to be achieved. The vision of SMAN 8 South Konawe is to become an institution with noble character, diligent in worship, leading in achievement, and insightful and caring about the green environment. This vision emphasizes the importance of integrating moral and

spiritual values in education as well as awareness of environmental sustainability. The big idea as stated in the school's mission, and to make it easier to achieve this vision, the mission of SMAN 8 South Konawe was prepared, including: 1) divine learning which is expected to realize learning oriented towards divine values, 2) quality education, namely providing quality education to achieve academic and non-academic achievements, with a focus on environmental preservation, 3) increasing the professionalism and quality of teaching and educational staff in accordance with developments in the world of education, 4) effective education management that can guarantee effective management of senior secondary education, efficient, transparent and accountable, 5) cooperation with the community and with various parties for the development and progress of the school, 6) a quality school environment by creating a school environment that is safe, comfortable, beautiful and caring for the preservation of natural resources, 7) preventing pollution in the school environment and where school residents live outside the school through a movement to cultivate habits of preserving the environment and preventing pollution.

This concept can be done by familiarizing students and the school community in general. Efforts to achieve the school's vision and mission targets require collective work, not only from the school community but also from related stakeholders. For example, to build learning facilities and infrastructure in schools such as assembly halls, basketball courts, fences, arranging parking locations, improving roads in the school environment, large funds and budgets are needed. The school's financial resources are very limited and only enough for school operations. The school initiates learning ideas and innovations based on the provision of educational facilities. Ideas and innovations are conveyed to relevant stakeholders, such as the Regional People's Representative Council of South Konawe Regency and the Regional People's Representative Council of Southeast Sulawesi Province as well as other related parties[1].

Interesting findings regarding the Islamic culture and religious moderation that are alive and practiced in all the daily activities of the school community at Public Senior High School 8 South Konawe are described as follows:

1. Religious Culture in Schools

Religious activities at Public Senior High School 8 South Konawe are an integral part of students' daily lives. Activities such as yasinan, cult, and group prayer are carried out regularly every month. Apart from that, this school also implements and gives special appreciation to Muslim students who regularly perform midday prayers in congregation at the prayer room at SMAN 8 South Konawe[2]. This shows the school's commitment to cultivating Islamic values, creating a spiritual atmosphere that supports the development of student character. Through this activity, students are not only taught about religious teachings, but are also expected to be able to internalize these values in everyday life. The religious culture in schools developed at SMAN 8 South Konawe has become familiar as found in the writings of several educational experts in the last 13 years who have adapted Islamic values in schools such as [1], [4]–[8], [18]–[25].

A balanced and non-extreme attitude in living a religious life, known as "wasatiyyah," as well as the importance of moderation education in Indonesia to overcome radicalization and intolerance. Implementation of religious moderation is carried out through curriculum development in higher education that includes the values of tolerance and non-violence, with character-based assessments to ensure the internalization of these values. Although there are challenges, such as resistance from conservative groups, opportunities to strengthen moderation through education remain, supported by government policies that establish Religious Moderation Houses at several universities in Indonesia, which require ongoing evaluation for their effectiveness. If this idea is achieved in the future, it will be easy to adapt it in middle school and below, which can form religious moderation from an early age [26].

Observer participant with the name MMA, a 21 year old man actively gave seven minutes of lecture material to Muslim students at the prayer room at SMAN 8 South Konawe, Indonesia. The seven-minute

lecture was held on Friday, August 2 2024. The theme of the Friday Taqwa activity, the activities consisted of reading Yasin, praying Asmaul Khusna, and kultum, and the lecture was seven minutes. This activity builds the character of Muslim students, so that they are accustomed to and routinely carry out their religious activities in the school environment. It is hoped that habits in the school environment in the future will be adapted to life outside school, especially when living in society.

2. Student behavior towards each other

One of the interesting findings in the observations was the behavior of students who respected and helped each other, even though there were religious differences between them. This tolerant attitude reflects religious moderation which is very important in a multicultural society. In the school context, students demonstrate the ability to work together and support each other regardless of religious background [27]. This not only creates a harmonious learning environment, but also forms a more inclusive student character [7], [25], [28], [29], polite and empathetic [30]–[32]. This attitude of mutual respect is a reflection of the values of religious moderation which can be an example for the wider community in maintaining harmony and peace amidst diversity [33]–[35].

Students are taught to understand and appreciate differences, while building solidarity between them. This is a significant step in creating a harmonious and peaceful environment in schools. The harmony that is formed at SMAN 8 South Konawe is not only built between fellow school members, but also with the environment around the school. This is not only shown in all the activities of the school community during the data collection process, but also in being the best in maintaining the cleanliness of the school environment at the Konda District level on the commemoration of the 79th Anniversary of the Republic of Indonesia, 17 August 2024[3]. It is hoped that the concept of coexistence with the environment for students will be able to arouse students' passion and interest in saving the environment in the future as has been stated by several experts such as [36]–[50]. Current conditions, especially security and environmental sustainability, including forests in Southeast Sulawesi Province, in the future are challenges for the current generation. They will live side by side with mining areas which have a tendency to exploit and exploit and threaten the sustainability of the environment and forests around us [51].

Students in realizing life and learning together at school by looking at students as their peers cannot be separated from the influence inherited by the school principal and teachers as well as educational staff. They were quite enthusiastic, let's say one of the students named Andowiu (anonymous) was male, around 17 years old, a class In carrying out his duties as a picket, he is not only tasked with recording students of his age who are late arriving, but also helps the school security guard open and close the gate when there are guests visiting. They were on picket duty during the day's ceremony and returned to the classroom when the learning process was about to begin[4]. The involvement of students in carrying out pickets on Monday aims to provide students with direct experience in controlling and increasing discipline among their peers. Through this activity, students not only learn about responsibility and cooperation, but also develop the ability to lead and influence positive behavior in the school environment [32], [52]–[54]. Optimizing the role of SMAN 8 South Konawe students in extracurricular activities, especially scouts and the Youth Red Cross[5].

Observations of student discipline are carried out routinely every morning. Observations started 15 minutes before school hours started every morning, namely 07.00 Central Indonesian Time and ended 30 minutes later. Almost every day you will find students who always arrive late. Students who are late will be given guidance and their tardiness list will be recorded. If someone is late in a row, then guidance will be increased to the guidance and counseling teacher. During observations, although students were always found who were late, almost no students were found who were repeatedly late. Students are required to be in the school environment during school hours which last up to 6-7 hours. However, students are still given the opportunity to carry out activities outside of school, such as making photocopies of lesson materials in class,

after obtaining permission from the teacher and picket officer.

3. Application of SGG and CHBP Values

The school also implements a culture of Smile, Greet, Greet (SGG) and Cleanliness, Health, Beauty, Politeness (CHBP). The application of these values not only reflects good ethics but also shows the integration of Islamic values in daily interactions. By accustoming students to adopt a positive attitude, schools contribute to forming good character and creating a clean and comfortable environment for the entire academic community. Schools are designed to support the growth and development of school sensitivity for its citizens [55]. This concept supports schools in overcoming disparities between their citizens [56], and can guide students and other school residents to always be inclusive of each other and their environment [57]. A positive attitude that is always applied is not only a habit for students, but also applies to other school members, especially teachers. The main teachers who monitor student activities are guidance and counseling teachers as well as Islamic religious education and character teachers [6].

The concept of strengthening religious moderation in Indonesia can be done by adopting traditional local culture through the role of kiai as spiritual authorities who have a strong influence in society. Kiai can integrate moderate values in religious teachings with local wisdom, such as respecting state symbols and preserving cultural diversity, which creates a sense of mutual respect between various religious groups. Thus, the education and example provided by kiai in the local cultural context not only strengthens religious moderation, but also promotes tolerance and social harmony, which is very important in Indonesia's pluralistic society [58].

4. Democratic Leadership Practices

The principal at SMAN 8 South Konawe applies a democratic leadership style, where teachers and students are given the opportunity to provide input in decision making. This approach reflects the principles of moderation, where all parties are involved in processes that affect them. In this way, students feel valued and have a role in the school community, which ultimately can increase their sense of responsibility and ownership of the educational process. This concept directs that every school member is a leader who has obligations that can be carried out responsibly [45], [59], [60].

Effective leadership in high school settings is critical to building interfaith dialogue and creating inclusive spaces for diverse perspectives within the Muslim community. These leaders need to understand and overcome the dichotomy between 'radicals' and 'moderates' by emphasizing values such as tolerance, harmony and openness. They must implement an approach that educates the public about the complexities of Islam, avoids negative stereotypes, and encourages the active participation of various groups in building a positive collective identity. Thus, good leadership can guide communities toward a more diverse and constructive understanding of religious practice [61].

During the observation, if an incident occurs, such as a meeting that all teachers must attend, then the observation participants are given the trust of the teachers and the head of SMAN 8 South Konawe, Indonesia to control the students. Students are not allowed to be outside the classroom. Students are ensured to orderly complete the assignments that have been prepared by the teacher. When the lesson time is over, the observation participants will collect the assignments the students have completed. Students are given the opportunity to rest on time and are prohibited from wandering outside the school. Together with teachers and other school members, we also provide guidance and training for students who have been appointed as Indonesian flag-raising troops in preparation for the 79th anniversary of Indonesia's independence. Indirectly, we observation participants are trained to control students, so that students are able to give maximum performance.

5. Respect for Diversity

Appreciation for diversity is clearly visible in student interactions at school. Students from various religious backgrounds can interact harmoniously, showing a real example of religious moderation. This creates an inclusive atmosphere, where all students feel welcome and valued. By building a culture that respects differences, SMAN 8 South Konawe not only educates students academically, but also forms a generation that is ready to face challenges in a diverse society. Equal treatment of fellow school members using the concept of religious moderation can be observed in the daily activities of all school members. The situation of teachers at this school is 51 people, with the majority of teachers being Muslim, namely 48 people, 1 person is Christian and 2 people are Hindu. Likewise, the condition of the 449 students, 437 (Islamic), 10 (Christian) and 2 (Hindu) were able to form harmony that strengthened each other [1], [3], [4], [8], [18], [62]–[64].

An attitude of accepting and respecting the existence and beliefs of other people who are different, both in the internal context between religious communities and between different religious communities. Tolerance serves as a basis for creating social harmony amidst diversity, while religious moderation emphasizes the importance of a balanced and non-extreme approach to religious practice, which allows believers to interact constructively without sacrificing the values of faith. Thus, both play an important role in strengthening social cohesion and preventing conflict in multicultural societies such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand [65].

The diversity in Islamic religious education, particularly among Muslim parents in Austria, highlights the importance of appreciating variation in religious practice. Parents want an education that not only emphasizes memorization and rigid teaching methods, but also on a deep understanding of Islamic values. They hope for an approach that allows children to explore and understand religion in a critical and open way, as well as creating opportunities for interfaith dialogue. Therefore, respect for diversity includes recognition of differences in religious practices and emphasizes the need for inclusive and contextual education, which respects the lived experiences and spiritual needs of each individual [66].

In accordance with the opinion of the experts quoted in compiling this article, treatment must be given equally to all school members regardless of religion, culture, ethnicity and the beliefs they adhere to. This concept is expected to form good harmony, so that the human resources produced from this school are better prepared to serve the citizens of Indonesia and the world. They are expected to become human beings who provide benefits not only to themselves, but also to their families, communities, nations and the world. They are prepared to be able to work and not just be spectators in their own homes amidst the openness and progress of technology and information which makes it easier to interact with the world even though they are separated by distance.

CONCLUSION

SMAN 8 South Konawe not only focuses on academic achievement, but has also succeeded in integrating Islamic values and religious moderation into the school culture. This approach creates an inclusive, harmonious and mutually respectful environment among all school members. By implementing the principles of religious moderation, this school has formed a tolerant and empathetic student character, as well as promoting harmony in diversity.

SMAN 8 South Konawe can continue to contribute to creating a peaceful and civilized educational environment. To maintain and improve the culture of religious moderation, SMAN 8 South Konawe is advised to: 1) increase routine training programs for teachers and staff on the importance of religious moderation and Islamic values, so that they can be better role models for students, 2) develop more

extracurricular activities that focus on interreligious dialogue and social activities involving students from various backgrounds, 3) collaboration with parents through parental involvement in the educational process by holding seminars or workshops on religious moderation to strengthen these values at home, 4) conducting regular evaluations of the implementation of religious moderation values in schools to identify challenges and opportunities for improvement, and 5) holding awareness campaigns about the importance of tolerance and mutual respect in the school environment and in the surrounding community.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Interview with the Principal of State High School 8 South Konawe (LOS) on July 30 2024. The

unstructured interview took place shortly before the presentation of the Field Introduction to School 1 in the Assembly Hall of SMAN 8 South Konawe.

[2] Interview with the Islamic Religious Education subject teacher at SMAN 8 South Konawe an. RRE (name changed) on August 12, 2024.

[3] Interview with the Head of SMAN 8 South Konawe LOS (name withheld), on August 21 2024

[4] Observation of the picket officers' activities on the sidelines of the ceremony on Monday 19 August 2024. Observations of the students' picket performance, interspersed with laughter and unstructured conversations with the Satpan of SMAN 8 South Konawe. Student picket officers do not work alone, they are always under the supervision and guidance of teachers who are regularly on picket duty.

[5] Interview with Andowiu (17 years old) student name anonymized, on August 19 2024.

[6] Interview with the Islamic Religious Education subject teacher at SMAN 8 South Konawe an. RRE (name withheld) on August 16 2024. The unstructured interview took place when the teacher in question was carrying out additional duties as a tutor in the implementation of the Introduction to School Field 1 for students of the Islamic Religious Education Study Program, Tarbiyah Faculty, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kendari in 2024.