Introducing *wasatiyyah* Islam in religious learning at schools to build a peaceful world civilization

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Abstract. This study aims to show that the introduction of *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islam in religious learning at schools is needed at this time to help break the chain of spreading religious radicalism that has penetrated into the world of education and at the same time help create a peaceful and harmonious world civilization. Methodologically, this is a library research using content analysis. The data obtained came from literature review analyzed by philosophical hermeneutics. Responding to the phenomenon of the increasingly widespread of Islamic radicalism that teaches violence in the name of religious teachings which has now infiltrated the environment of education and targets school-age children, it is necessary to take necessary measures to prevent and stop the spread of this ideology. One elegant way is to provide an understanding of religious moderation to school-age children. In the context of Indonesia, for example, it can be done by introducing and instilling *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islam to students in their learning process in the classroom, be it in the form of a series of formal curriculum, namely through the delivery of lessons of *Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti* [Islamic Religious Education and Character] from the perspective of moderation, as well as in the form of a hidden curriculum, namely the creation of a learning atmosphere that is conducive, harmonious and full of tolerance and mutual respect for differences among the students.

Keywords: *wasatiyyah* Islam; religious learning; peaceful civilization

1   Introduction

Today, we are witnessing the phenomenon of increasingly widespread of Islamic radicalism that justifies violence in the name of religion in our society. Sadly, this trend of radicalism has now begun to penetrate the realm of education and also targets school-age children. In this study, I would like to discuss how the stakeholders involved in the educational environment responded to this ideology of radicalism which is claimed to have intervened in the world of education and what actions are urgently needed to prevent and stop its spreading, which is the question of this research. Methodologically, this is a library research using content analysis. The data obtained came from literature review which are then analyzed using philosophical hermeneutics. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of this subject, I will discuss the following points in order. First, the phenomenon of radicalism and its impact on the world of education today. Then, it is followed by a discussion on the efforts taken by stakeholders of education, including the government and the teachers, in responds to the spreading of radicalism as an ideology in the field of education. In the next section, which is the core of this study, I analyze the importance of introduction of *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islam and

the promotion of religious moderation to students in their learning process at school. Finally, this study is closed with a conclusion.

2   The phenomenon of radicalism and its impact on the sphere of education

Today, the thought of Islamic radicalism has become a new phenomenon that characterizes religious life in our homeland, Indonesia. This can be witnessed through the spread of radicalism ideology and acts of terror in Indonesia (Muzakki 2014, 4). This is unfortunate because previously Indonesia was dominated by moderate Islamic understanding. Radical groups are aggressively spreading their thoughts and perspectives to various levels of society. Several observers have said and warned us about the dangers of radicalism which is now starting to penetrate in the realm of education (Abdallah, 2016). The radical groups also target school-age children to be indoctrinated with their thought and ideology (Asril 2016, 284). In fact, many countries in the world feel anxiety about these radical groups. They are considered a real threat to the security and harmony of society (Tambak 2021, 105).

The radical groups justify acts of violence and extremism in the name of religion. Indonesia has also experienced bad consequences caused by acts of terror and violence claimed by radical groups. Acts of violence and terror carried out by radical groups have seriously endangered the safety of the public, such as suicide bombings that have occurred several times. They are Bali bombing on 12 October 2002 in which at least 202 people were reported to be killed (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-19881138), the second Bali bombing on 2 October 2005 which killed 25 people (Lewis *et al*. 2013; Bonner 2021), bombing of three churches in Surabaya on 13 May 2018, in which at least 13 people were reported to be killed (https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44101070), and most recently the Makassar bombing on 20 March 2021 which injured 20 people (Satria 2021; Azanella 2021). This are clear examples of acts that endanger the safety of mankind, which the government has declared as an act carried out by extremist and radical groups.

Ironically, some of the perpetrators of the existing terror acts are school-age children who are still young. We are all worried that more and more school-age children will be polluted and exposed to radical thoughts. This can happen if the thoughts and doctrines of the radicals can freely intervene in the education space and there is no prevention. It is reasonable if there is a fear that schools can be used as a place to indoctrinate students with Islamic fundamentalism (Muslih 2021, 198). In order to prevent the ideology of radicalism from intervening in the area of education, the chain of its distribution must be firmly cut, and therefore rescue actions are needed.

3   Preventing the spread of radicalism in the educational environment

As a party that is obliged to provide security and comfort to its people, the government is the most responsible for taking strategic efforts and actual actions to prevent, stop and destroy radicalism from the country of Indonesia. However, it seems that the government alone will not be able to eradicate this radicalism. The government needs partners who can work together and work hand in hand in carrying out this tough task. So far, the government has taken legal action and arrested and brought the perpetrators of acts of terrorism to justice and sent them and their supporters to prison (Botma 2020, 173). However, this repressive measure alone will not be efficient to eradicate radicalism, because what happens next is that friends, family, or members

of the radical group will take revenge against the security apparatus (the police) because they are considered the party responsible for killing the life of their comrade in arms. Thus, radicalism will not be easily extinguished by only security approach because it is an ideology (See Hilmy 2015, 418). An ideology cannot be stopped by simply killing the perpetrators. Therefore, other breakthroughs must be sought to help the government stop the spread of this ideology of radicalism.

Preventing the spread of Islamic radicalism can be carried out with a hard approach such as arresting and bringing the perpetrators to justice. However, it seems that if we rely solely on this approach the results may less effective. Therefore, to terminate the chain of recruitment of radical movements and terrorism many strategies can be taken. One of the strategies might be involving young people in dialogue activities about Islam and democracy (Fenton 2014, 2). Another one is creating "a moderate education policy which involves collaboration between governments and different religions" (Alam 2020, 500).

In fact, to prevent the ideology of radicalism from entering the world of education the Indonesian government and society have responded to by, among others, campaigning for religious moderation (Manshur dan Husni 2020, 5851). It is important to campaign for the teaching of Islam through education with a moderate approach, often called *wasatiyyah* (Fitri, 2015). The provision of moderate (*wasatiyyah*) Islamic Religious Education proved to be effective in increasing the understanding of the Muslim community about the importance of *wasatiyyah* Islamic values, for example changing the understanding of the concept of *jihad* from violence to humanity which involves accepting pluralism, tolerance and increasing welfare (Alam 2020, 497). Islamic Religious Education not only aims at producing pious people, but also at "making civilized and humane citizens" (Maulana 2017, 396). Since the Islamic Religious Education has functions as a medium of moral formation and character building for students, it can be used as "an alternative solution to prevent the development of radicalism" (Nurhayati and Hamid 2020, 111). Through religious moderation movement it is intended that people behave moderately in carrying out their religious teachings and are tolerant of others who adhere to the teachings of a different religion.

The author is of the opinion that radicalism is a trend or perspective on religious teachings. So, it will not be effective if handled with only the approach of security and law. In the author's view, a trend must be countered with a trend as well. So, the way to stop the trend of radicalism must be through other trends. The trend of moderatism, in my opinion, can be an option to be offered and taught to students in the schools so that they have a good understanding of Islam. With a comprehensive understanding of moderate Islam, it is hoped that the students will have good attitudes and behavior as well as tolerant and respectful towards other people of different religions and beliefs. To prevent students from being exposed to the teachings of radicalism which interpret Islam rigidly and incorrectly, they need to be given an explanation of moderate Islamic teachings. This can be done by teachers in the learning process in the classroom.

4   Promoting religious moderation to students in their learning process at school

The state's provision of religious education

In Indonesia, religious education is "an important pillar of the official education system" (Künkler and Lerner 2016, 7). Religious education (including Islamic Religious Education) is central and must be provided at every level of education throughout the territory

of the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia. The state constitution of 1945 and *Pancasila* (five principles) as the foundation of the state are the basis for education in Indonesia. Clearly, Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (chapter II, article 2) states, "National education is based on *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia." Then, concerning religious education (including Islamic), The law no. 20 of 2003 (chapter V, article 12, verse 1, letter a) explicitly says: "(1) Every student at every level of the Education unit has the right to: a. get religious education in accordance with the religion he adheres to and taught by educators of the same religion; [...]" (*Undang-Undang No.20 Tahun 2003; Undang Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945*). The aim of Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia is "not only to create a religious person, but also making a good citizen" (Abdallah 2016, 625). As the majority, Muslims in Indonesia feel comfortable because the entitlements to obtain religious education for their children is constitutionally guaranteed by the state with the existing laws and regulations.

It should be emphasized that the Indonesian government has a strong role and control in the provision of religious education. The government also requires all existing levels of education to provide religious education and include it in its curriculum (See *Undang-Undang No.20 tahun 2003*). The state even initiated the provision of Islamic religious education textbooks. This can be seen, for example, for the 2013 curriculum which is applied in elementary to secondary levels, the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture has provided a textbook called *Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti* [Islamic Religious and Character Education] for elementary to senior high school students (Grade I until XII) (See *Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI*, 2014). This demonstrates that the state's guarantee of the provision on Islamic religious education is not only in rhetoric but also proven through concrete actions.

It is worth noted that the state does interfere further regarding the content that must be given to students. The Ministry of Education and Culture through the assigned committee determine which materials should be included and which one cannot be put in the textbooks they publish in terms of Islamic Religious Education. This textbook must be taught as the main teaching material in all schools (primary to secondary level) in public schools across the country (See *Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI*, 2014). However, there are a small number of schools that use textbooks other than those published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, including the ones published by national publishers, such as *Erlangga* and *Yudhistira*, but still, the flow of contents must follow the directions and guidelines that have been determined by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture.

It clear that in Indonesia, the existence of educational institutions is regulated by law. The Law No. 20 of 2003 on National Education System states that "Every formal and non-formal education unit that is established must obtain a permit from the Government or Regional Government" (chapter XVII, article 62). Furthermore, with regard to the curriculum, Religious Education is included as subject that is mandatory at all levels of education in Indonesia. Religious Education is one of the most important elements in the national education system in Indonesia. The Law No. 20 of 2003 explicitly mentions and places religious lessons at the first order of the list of subjects that must be included in the primary and secondary education curriculum. The law states that, "Elementary and secondary education curriculum must contain: a. Religious education; b. Civic education; c. Language; [...]" (chapter X, article 37, verse 1). Even at the level of higher education (university), religious education is still required. It is explicitly stated that "The higher education curriculum must contain: a. Religious education; b. Civic education; and c. Language" (chapter X, article 37, verse 2) (*Undang-Undang No.20 Tahun 2003*). This confirms that the state really appreciates the importance of religious values

to be taught to every student, so that they become human beings with noble character to be good citizens.

It should be added here that the head of the education unit (school principal) is the party that bears responsibility of designing and at the same time implementing the school curriculum including religious education in the institutions it leads. The curriculum of religious instruction in the state schools is developed by the Ministry of Education but it is the Ministry of Religious Affairs that supervises the curriculum as well as the textbooks (Künkler & Lerner 2016, 8). Today, the curriculum being implemented in all schools in Indonesia (elementary and secondary levels) is the 2013 curriculum. The subject of Islamic Religious Education applied in the schools automatically follows the signs given in the that curriculum. In the 2013 curriculum, textbooks for the subject of Religious Education have been developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and distributed free of charge to the students across the country (See https://bse.belajar.kemdikbud.go.id). The duty of the head of the education unit (school principal) is to optimize its human resources, the teachers, to explain what is contained in the textbooks to students. In addition, the teachers can enrich or expand the materials already presented in the textbooks with additional materials from other sources if necessary.

Introducing *wasathiyyah* Islam in the learning process

Islamic religious education has strategic ability to respond to several problems in religious life, including the issue of radicalism that remains dominating the lives of religious people in Indonesia. Therefore, as an institution, Islamic religious education requires empowering to stop the flow of radicalism (Arifin 2016, 94). Through the role of this educational institution, teachers and lecturers as well as the academic community can actively strengthen national insight, moderate attitudes and tolerance in the younger generation (Botma 2020, 173).

With a large number of students in Indonesia being exposed to radicalism (See Afrianty, 2012), the author is of the opinion that it is important for the teachers and leaders of education unit to fortify their students from these dangers so that the students do not fall into radicalism such as being fanatics and intolerance, and acts of violence or even terrorism. One of the elegant ways is to provide a correct understanding and giving Islamic Religious Education that is *rahmatan lil alamin* (have a mercy for all universe) applying the concept of moderate (*wasathiyyah*) Islam. The students at schools are young people that are vulnerable to being infiltrated by radicalism which justifies violence in practicing the teachings they believe in (See Tambak 2021). Letting them fall into the hands of radical Islamists is just the same as letting them lose their future. So, it is the duty of teachers of Islamic Religious Education and school leaders to convey *wasathiyyah* Islam which teaches harmony and respect to others who have different beliefs or religions.

> Now, what is meant by *wasathiyah* Islam? Actually, the term *wasathiyyah* is taken and developed from the expression *Ummatan Wasathan* mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah al-Baqarah verse 143. Furthermore, it is necessary to explain that *Ummatan Wasathan* is "a society that always maintains its balance, not falling into left extremism or right extremism, and not pulled into radicalism and violence" and this type of society is able to witness the truth for others (Kasdi 2019: 181). As a matter of fact, the concept of *wasathiyyah* has existed since the birth of the Islamic faith in this world (Mujani *et al*. 2015: 66).

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 2019:181). It has similarity with *al-tawasuth* or *al-wasath* (moderation), *al-qisth* (justice), *al-tawazun* (balance), and *al-*

i'tidal (harmony) (Hilmy 2013: 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: 66).

Mohamed Baianonie, as quoted in Mujani *et al.*, states that *wasath* has three meanings, namely, "to be moderate, to be in the middle, and to be the best". Thus, when Allah explains that the Muslims are a *wasath* community, it is meant "moderation, middle way and the best people". It is stated that moderation in Islam shows that "a Muslim should stabilise as much as possible their affairs and avoid extremist activities which cause disorder or chaos" (Mujani *et al.* 2015: 67). Meanwhile, Ibn Kathir, as quoted in Azis, says that what *Wasathan* meant was choice and the best, Allah made this people the best people. Allah has specified it with the most perfect shari'a and the most straightforward guidelines and the clearest paths (Azis 2020: 6).

It is imperative to emphasize here that the essence of Islamic *wasathiyyah* concept is contained in many places in the Qur'an. The first is the statement in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143 which reads: "And thus We have made you a just community that you will be as witnesses over the people and the Messenger will be a witness over you". Another statement is in Surah Al-Furqan verse 67 which reads: "And [they are] those who, when they spend, do so not excessively and not sparingly, but are ever, between that, [justly] moderate". It is explained that moderation in religion should be implemented in daily life, and it is also believed that if Muslim community practiced moderation then "there would not be severely disturbing violence and extremism, a constraint to peace in the world today" (Mujani *et al.* 2015: 67).

>Education is the most strategic means of strengthening moderate Islam (*wasathiyyah*), which is the main character of Indonesian Islam. Traditionally, Islamic education organized by Indonesian Islamic education institutions definitely teaches its students about moderate Indonesian Islam (Suharto 2017: 156). However, since the beginning of the reform era in 1998 a threat has been emerging as transnational Islam brought by activists from Middle East came into Indonesia (Hasan 2010). They established transnational Islamic education institutions, and with the formula of "Islamization of Indonesia" the proponents are trying to introduce Islam as an ideology to the students. This situation demands the importance of strengthening the role of Islamic education institutions in implementing the "Indonesianization of Islam", so that moderate Islam (*wasathiyyah*) can be maintained in the archipelago (Suharto 2017: 156).

Islamic education institutions in Indonesia are required to be able to play a role in strengthening moderate (*wasathiyyah*) Islam. The role that Islamic education institutions can play in this realm is the installation of moderate Islamic ideology to students in the learning process. There are three aspects that need to be considered in this installation, namely (1) the emphasis of moderate Islam in formulating educational goals, (2) internalizing moderate values in designing hidden curriculum, and (3) filtering teaching materials so that moderate Islamic ideology can be installed on students (Suharto 2017: 175). The process of installing a moderate Islamic ideology is, of course, not an easy task, but it is something that can be worked on.

> I believe that everyone will agree that Islamic *wasathiyyah* concept is the most suitable paradigm for Indonesia today, as it adopts the middle path and moderate way. As a matter of fact, Indonesia actually has implemented this concept of *wasathiyyah*. The proof of this is, as we have witnessed, the implementation of *Pancasila* (The Five Principles), *Undang-Undang Dasar 1945* (The State Constitution of 1945), *Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia/ NKRI* (The Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia), and the motto of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (united in diversity) in Indonesia whose citizens are very diverse and multi-cultural. Therefore, it is important to promote and practice the Islamic *wasathiyyah* paradigm in building the

ummatan wasathan that is a just, prosperous, peaceful, inclusive and harmonious society. One of the best means to empower the *wasathiyyah* paradigm is through the learning process in education, as it becomes one of the agents of social change in society.

5 Conclusion

It is very regrettable that nowadays Islamic radicalism has colored our religious life in our beloved country, Indonesia. Unfortunately, this radicalism is now starting to penetrate the world of education and targeting school-age children. To cut the chain of spreading Islamic radicalism in the world of education rescue actions are needed. So far, the government has taken legal action by arresting and bringing the perpetrators of acts of terrorism to justice and sent them to prison. However, this repressive measure alone will not be efficient to eradicate radicalism. To say that radicalism is a trend is quite reasonable. A trend must be countered with a trend as well. In other words, to stop radicalism as a trend, it is necessary to present a similar trend that is more interesting and makes sense in terms of presenting the interpretation of Islam. In the context of educating students in schools and prevent them from being exposed to radical interpretation of Islam, the trend of moderatism can be an option to be offered to students in schools so that they have the right understanding of Islam. Education is the most strategic means of strengthening *wasathiyyah* (moderate) Islam, which is the main character of Indonesian Islam. In order to be successful in implanting it, several important things must be considered, namely: the emphasis of moderate Islam in formulating educational goals, internalizing moderate values in designing hidden curriculum, and filtering teaching materials so that moderate Islamic ideology can be installed on students. Introducing *wasatiyyah* (moderate) Islam in religious learning process at schools is a must and obligatory to all teachers of religious education in order to build a peaceful world civilization.

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