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THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (PAI) IN COUNTERING RADICAL IDEOLOGIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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ABSTRACTS

Background: The widespread dissemination of radical ideologies through digital media poses a serious threat to the younger generation. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has strategic potential to shape ideological resilience and religious moderation, yet it needs to be actualized in line with the challenges of the digital era; **Purpose of the Study:** This study aims to analyze the role of PAI in countering radicalism in the digital world and to formulate strategies for strengthening PAI learning based on digital literacy and values of tolerance; **Methods:** The research employs a qualitative approach using literature study and content analysis of primary sources (PAI curriculum, education policies) and secondary sources (journals, books, and online radicalism cases). Data were analyzed thematically to identify solution patterns; **Results:** Findings indicate that PAI is effective as an anti-radicalism bulwark when combining three aspects: (1) strengthening inclusive religious understanding, (2) integrating digital literacy into learning materials, and (3) collaboration between teachers, parents, and digital platforms. Examples of good practices include using social media for moderation campaigns and interactive case-based learning; **Conclusions:** PAI does not only serve as a means of transmitting religious knowledge but also as a deradicalization instrument in the digital era. Curriculum innovation and enhancing PAI teachers' digital literacy capacity are essential to maximizing this role.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The world is currently facing a major challenge in the form of the widespread dissemination of radical ideologies through digital media. According to the Global Terrorism Index (2023), (Peace 2023) , more than 60% of radical groups utilize digital platforms to recruit new members, with the primary target being young people aged 15-24. In Indonesia, the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT 2023) has recorded a 35% increase in cases of digital radicalism over the past three years, primarily through social media platforms such as *Facebook*, *Telegram*, and *TikTok*. This phenomenon not only threatens national security but also undermines interfaith harmony, which is the foundation of the Indonesian nation.

Rapid technological advancements have created a paradox in religious life. On one hand, digitalization facilitates access to religious knowledge, but on the other hand, it serves as a medium for the spread of radical ideologies that are difficult to control. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (2023) (Kemenkominfo 2023) reported that approximately 2,500 radical content pieces circulate on the internet in Indonesia each month. This situation is exacerbated by the low digital literacy of the public, particularly in filtering religious information, as indicated in a survey by the Center for Islamic and Community Studies (PPIM) of 1,200 respondents in 12 provinces.

In this context, Islamic Religious Education (IRE) plays a crucial role as a bulwark against ideological threats. Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that IRE aims to produce students who are faithful, pious, and of noble character, while also being able to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. (Nurkholis 2022) , in their longitudinal study of 15 secondary schools, found that PAI instruction that integrates values of religious moderation can reduce students' vulnerability to radical ideologies by up to 40%.

However, challenges in the digital era demand fundamental transformation in the PAI learning paradigm. A study conducted by the Research Team of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2023) revealed several major weaknesses: (1) 85% of PAI teachers are not trained in digital literacy, (2) learning materials are still doctrinal without digital contextualization, and (3) lack of collaboration between schools and digital platforms. These findings align with the research titled " , which emphasizes the need for a digital citizenship-based reconstruction of the PAI curriculum.

Previous studies have addressed related aspects. Nurdin (2020) explored the role of PAI in deradicalization within pesantren settings, while Zulkifli (2021) focused on conventional PAI learning media. However, these studies have not comprehensively addressed digital adaptation aspects. The UNESCO report on Digital Islam Education indicates that only 12% of religious education institutions in Southeast Asia have structured digital literacy programs.

This research gap becomes more evident when linked to the latest findings of *the Microsoft Digital Civility Index* (2023), which ranks Indonesia 29th out of 32 countries in terms of digital resilience against extremist content. This highlights the urgency of research that integrates three aspects: PAI, radicalism prevention, and digital transformation.

B. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach through a systematic literature review to explore the role of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in countering digital radicalism. The goal is to gain a deep understanding of how IRE can address the spread of radical ideologies in the digital age by reviewing academic texts, educational policies, and relevant case studies.

A qualitative approach is used to allow for a detailed and in-depth analysis of the subject matter. This methodology is chosen because it helps to uncover the contextual factors influencing the development of moderate religious understanding among students, particularly in the face of digital radicalism. By engaging with primary sources such as the IRE curriculum and educational policies, as well as secondary sources like journals, books, and case studies, the research aims to synthesize findings that highlight effective strategies for deradicalization.

The data collected will be analyzed thematically, focusing on identifying key issues and solutions related to the integration of inclusive religious understanding, digital literacy in education, and collaboration between teachers, parents, and digital platforms. This process will allow for a comprehensive understanding of how these factors contribute to counteracting radical ideologies in educational settings.

Following the analysis, the study will evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used within IRE to combat radicalism. The synthesis of these findings will inform recommendations for strengthening the role of IRE in promoting digital literacy and values of tolerance, ultimately offering insights into how IRE can adapt to the evolving challenges of the digital age.

This methodology emphasizes the importance of collaboration among schools, families, and digital communities to create an environment that fosters moderation. By enhancing the curriculum and teacher training, IRE can play a crucial role in preparing the younger generation to navigate the digital landscape while upholding values of peace, tolerance, and inclusivity.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Radicalism and Its Challenges in the Digital Age

Radicalism is not only manifested through physical violence, but also includes ideological indoctrination that is exclusive, intolerant of differences, and rejects democratic principles. In the digital age, radicalism has found a more massive and effective means of dissemination through social media platforms such as *YouTube*, *Facebook*, *Telegram*, and closed discussion forums (Stanton 2002). Radical groups exploit social media algorithms that tend to reinforce *echo chambers* to disseminate propaganda content in a structured manner. They package religious messages with appealing narratives, yet these often deviate from moderate and inclusive interpretations of Islam.

According to data from (BNPT 2021), 85% of radicalization processes in Indonesia over the past few years have been carried out through digital media. Teenagers and college students are the most vulnerable groups because they are in the process of searching for their identity and often do not receive sufficient guidance in understanding Islam in its entirety. In this regard, Islamic Religious Education can play a key role in strengthening the ideological resilience of the younger generation.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) has a strategic role in protecting the younger generation from radical ideologies. Through a holistic approach, IRE not only teaches ritual aspects of worship but also emphasizes values **such** as tolerance, moderation, and balance. Some steps that can be optimized include:

- a. Strengthening Religious Digital Literacy Students need to be equipped with critical skills in assessing religious content on the internet, including recognizing the characteristics of radical narratives that often use narrow dichotomies such as infidel-believer or halal-haram.
- b. A Contextual Approach in Teaching PAI teachers must be able to connect religious texts with Indonesia's diverse social reality, for example through discussions on *Fiqh Al-Waqi'* (contextual fiqh) and the inclusive history of Islam in the archipelago.
- c. Collaboration with Families and Communities. According to research by the National Institute of Sciences and Technology (, deradicalization will be more effective if it involves the triple helix (school, family, and religious community) to create an environment that supports moderate values.

2. The Urgency of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as an Ideological Shield

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) not only plays a role in transmitting religious knowledge (*tafaqquh fi al-din*) but also functions as an instrument for *character building*, morality, and social attitudes among students. In the context of deradicalization, PAI must be able to present Islam as a religion that is friendly (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*), moderate (*wasatiyyah*), and soothing, while countering extreme narratives that distort religious teachings. Islam needs to be presented as a religion that upholds the values of peace (*salam*), human rights (*karamah insaniyyah*), and social harmony (*ukhuwah basyariyyah*).

PAI is not only meant to instill religious understanding but also serves as a means of character, moral, and social attitude formation for students. In the context of deradicalization, PAI must be able to present Islam as a religion that is peaceful, moderate, and soothing. Islam must be portrayed as a religion that loves peace, upholds human rights, and promotes the creation of a harmonious social life.

According to Azyumardi (, quality Islamic education must avoid doctrinal and exclusive approaches, as such methods tend to foster rigid and intolerant interpretations. Instead, PAI should adopt a dialogical, contextual, and participatory approach so that students do not merely memorize religious texts but are also able to internalize universal Islamic values such as justice ('adl), compassion (rahmah), and wisdom (hikmah). (Azra 2017)

Several principles that can be developed in PAI to strengthen the character of students include:

- a. Education in Noble Morals (*Tarbiyat al-Akhlaq*)

Quoting Al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, moral education is the core of religion, as it shapes an honest, tolerant, and empathetic personality. PAI education must integrate the exemplary stories of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in building the pluralistic society of Madinah.

- b. Socio-Cultural Approach

Abdurrahman Mas'ud (2020) in *Character Education Based on Local Wisdom* emphasizes that PAI must be relevant to Indonesia's social reality. For example, teaching Fiqh Al-Ta'ayush (the jurisprudence of living together) as a response to Indonesia's diversity of ethnic groups, religions, and cultures.

c. Critique of Radical Narratives. (Mas'ud 2022)

PAI must equip students with counter-narrative literacy against extremism, for example by deconstructing radical interpretations that justify violence. In *Digital Islam*, it is shown that radical groups often manipulate verses of jihad without proper historical context. (Mandaville 1999) .

3. Integration of Moderate Islamic Values in the PAI Curriculum

The Islamic Education Curriculum (PAI) must be designed to instill moderate Islamic values (wasathiyah), such as tolerance, justice, deliberation, respect for differences, and rejection of violence. The concept of religious moderation is not only the answer to the problems of radicalism and intolerance, but also the foundation of Islamic education that is rahmatan lil 'alamin. The instillation of these values must begin at the elementary education level and continue through higher education to shape students' inclusive and open-minded character toward diversity. (RI. 2019) .

For example, when discussing the concept of jihad, teachers need to explain that jihad is not solely about physical warfare but also includes the struggle against one's desires, seeking knowledge, self-improvement, and contributing to the building of a just and prosperous society (Al-Makin, 2020). Such an approach aligns with the values of moderation that avoid extremism in understanding Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, the PAI curriculum should also include contextual studies on current issues, such as the relationship between Islam and democracy, pluralism, women's rights in Islam, and the challenges faced by Muslims in dealing with globalization and transnational ideologies. This will help students understand that Islamic teachings are capable of engaging with modern realities and do not contradict universal principles of humanity. (Munir 2022) emphasize the importance of reformulating the PAI curriculum to make it more adaptive to contemporary challenges and prevent it from becoming a breeding ground for narrow and radical religious interpretations.

The implementation of a moderate curriculum must also be accompanied by intensive teacher training on the values of moderation so that they can convey them accurately and contextually. PAI teachers must be able to act as agents of religious moderation in schools through an inclusive, dialogic, and tolerant approach (. Without a deep understanding from teachers, the moderate values targeted in the curriculum will not be effectively internalized by students.

4. The Role of PAI Teachers as Agents of Deradicalization

Teachers are central figures in education who are not only tasked with transferring knowledge but also shaping students' character and worldview. In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), teachers have a strategic position as agents of deradicalization responsible for instilling peaceful, tolerant, and inclusive Islamic values. This requires PAI teachers to possess strong academic competencies, a deep

and moderate understanding of religion, and pedagogical skills to deliver instructional materials in a dialogic and humanistic manner (Mulyadhi 2020) .

PAI teachers must be able to serve as role models and facilitators who guide students in comprehensively and contextually understanding Islamic teachings. In facing a complex digital era full of ideological challenges, continuous training and guidance for teachers is very important. This training program must include the ability to detect early indications of radical thinking among students, conflict resolution skills, and the strengthening of the *wasathiyah* narrative of Islam (Zulfiqar and Said 2021) .

Beyond the classroom, PAI teachers are also encouraged to be active in the digital space. They can utilize social media and online platforms as tools for *da'wah* and education. For example, by creating positive and educational content about peaceful Islamic teachings, hosting online discussions, and featuring progressive, inclusive Islamic figures who contribute to the nation's progress. This approach can help stem the spread of radical ideologies that often exploit digital media as a propaganda tool.

The success of deradicalization efforts in schools is closely tied to teachers' ability to understand and internalize the essence of Islam as a religion of *mercy for all creation*, a religion that rejects violence and upholds the values of compassion, justice, and peace. Therefore, strengthening teachers' capacities, both academically and spiritually, must be a priority in national education policies. (Sukarman, Raharjo, and Syukur 2019)

5. Optimizing Digital Media as a Tool for Anti-Radicalism Education

Digital media, apart from being a challenge, also presents an opportunity in anti-radicalism education. PAI must take advantage of advances in information technology as a means of conveying Islamic teachings in a creative and interesting way. Through educational videos, religious podcasts, online discussion forums, and social media, the values of peaceful Islam can be disseminated widely and massively.

Educational institutions need to collaborate with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious leaders, and Muslim *content creators* with a moderate Islamic background to create a healthy and educational digital ecosystem. Religious digital literacy must also be taught to students so that they are able to select and filter religious content that is appropriate for consumption.

Heryadi emphasizes the importance of building digital critical awareness among the younger generation so that they do not become victims of manipulative digital propaganda. Therefore, synergy between educators, the government, and the community in building a friendly and radicalism-free cyberspace is greatly needed. (Heryadi 2021)

Islamic Religious Education bears a significant responsibility in shaping the younger generation to be not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually and socially mature. In the digital age, which is full of conflicting information and destructive ideologies, PAI must emerge as a beacon that illuminates the path of the nation's generation towards peace, tolerance, and progress. Through a moderate,

contextual, and digital-based approach, PAI can become a strong fortress in countering radicalism and building an advanced Islamic civilization.

D. CONCLUSION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role as the main fortress in facing and countering the spread of radical ideologies, especially in the digital era characterized by rapid and unstoppable information flows. In this context, the transformation of PAI learning is a necessity, namely by integrating the values of religious moderation, such as tolerance, respect for differences, and an inclusive attitude, into a learning approach that is adaptive to technological advances and developments in the digital world. This integration has proven effective in fostering ideological resilience among students, enabling them not only to understand religious teachings textually but also to interpret Islamic values contextually and in a manner relevant to contemporary life.

The role of PAI teachers is very strategic in this process. Teachers who are competent in digital literacy and able to apply contextual and dialogic learning methods are at the forefront in countering various radical narratives that now easily infiltrate social media, online forums, and other digital content. Interactive and technology-based PAI education not only encourages active student participation but also fosters critical thinking toward information circulating in the digital space, ensuring students are less susceptible to extremist ideologies.

However, the effectiveness of PAI in protecting students from radicalism cannot stand alone. This success requires cross-sector collaboration, including government support in the form of progressive education regulations and policies, the involvement of educational institutions in strengthening the teaching system, active participation of parents in monitoring the use of technology at home, and the role of digital platform providers in filtering deviant religious content. This multi-stakeholder synergy is crucial for creating a holistic and conducive educational ecosystem for fostering moderate character development among the younger generation.

Going forward, the development of a digital-based PAI curriculum is an urgent need. The curriculum must be responsive to the challenges of the times, able to accommodate developments in information technology, and remain rooted in the noble values of Islamic teachings. Additionally, ongoing teacher training programs for PAI should be a priority, ensuring educators are not only digitally literate but also sensitive to radicalism issues and capable of managing learning in creative and solution-oriented ways. Thus, PAI will remain relevant and effective in addressing the dynamic ideological challenges of the increasingly complex digital age.

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