

The Principal's Role in Implementing Religious Moderation Values in Junior High School of Tanjung Beringin District

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Abstract

This study examines the role of school principals in implementing religious moderation in three junior high schools (SMP) in Tanjung Beringin Sub-district, Serdang Bedagai Regency, focusing on leadership practices that support the creation of a harmonious and inclusive educational environment. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, this study aims to explore an in-depth understanding of the educational dynamics that occur in the context of religious diversity at the junior high school level. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews with principals, teachers and students, and analysis of relevant documents. Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that principals at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin, and SMP Swasta Berdikari play a significant role in promoting religious moderation through inclusive policies and practices. As managers, principals implement principles such as collective prayers, 3S (Smile, Greet, and Salute) activities, and participation in religious activities, which form a harmonious atmosphere in the school. As leaders, they provide direction through regular meetings to reinforce the values of tolerance and mutual respect. As supervisors, principals ensure that there is no discrimination or disharmony in the school environment, and as administrators, they work closely with the community to create a conducive environment. Overall, the role of school principals is crucial in building inclusive and tolerant schools and supporting the implementation of religious moderation among students.

Keywords: Principal, Implementation, Religious Moderation.

Introduction

Indonesia, known as a country rich in religious, ethnic, cultural and traditional diversity, is a clear example of social plurality.¹ This diversity is reflected in the variety of religions and beliefs practiced and the patterns of life, art and culture that develop. Since its formation, Indonesia has been known as a pluralistic nation, the result of the accumulation of ancestral values and the influence of external teachings that helped shape the nation's identity. Such diversity enriches social life without diminishing the spirit of unity, as reflected in the national motto “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika,” which means “Different but still one.”²

Existing diversity is often a source of debate and conflict. Conflicts between religious groups, more often fueled by radical and extreme views, affect social stability and potentially threaten national integrity.³ Some researchers explain some of the threats to national integration, such as blasphemy cases,⁴ social media hate speech,⁵ to the vandalism of houses of worship,⁶ Signaling tensions that can undermine religious harmony. In this context, according to Carolina, religious moderation emerges as an important perspective that can reduce extremism, open space for dialog, and strengthen tolerance between different groups.⁷

Religious moderation is a principle that teaches religious appreciation in a moderate, non-extreme manner. It allows people to accept differences without reducing the depth of individual belief in their religion. Pribadyo Prakosa views religious moderation as one of the strategies to strengthen harmony and national unity in the

¹ Afnan Fuadi, *Keragaman Dalam Dinamika Sosial Budaya Kompetensi Sosial Kultural Perekat Bangsa* (Deepublish, 2020).

² Yulianus Payzon Aituru and Maria Yeti Andrias, “Keberagaman Dalam Kesatuan: Bhinneka Tunggal Ika Sebagai Pilar Pembentukan Hukum Nasional Di Republik Indonesia,” *UNES Law Review* 5, no. 4 (2023): 4797–4805.

³ Triantoro Miranu, “Merajut Nasionalisme Di Tengah Ancaman Disintegrasi Bangsa,” *Cakrawala Pendidikan* 20, no. 1 (2017): 24–31.

⁴ Yaya Mulya Mantri, “Kasus Penistaan Agama Pada Berbagai Era Dan Media Di Indonesia,” *Definisi: Jurnal Agama Dan Sosial Humaniora* 1, no. 3 (2022): 123–38.

⁵ Dian Junita Ningrum, Suryadi Suryadi, and Dian Eka Chandra Wardhana, “Kajian Ujaran Kebencian Di Media Sosial,” *Jurnal Ilmiah KORPUS* 2, no. 3 (2018): 241–52.

⁶ Abdul Jamil Wahab, “Resolusi Konflik Struktural Dan Kultural: Studi Kasus Perusakan Rumah Ibadah Ahmadiyah Di Sintang Kalbar,” *Harmoni* 20, no. 2 (2021): 188–208.

⁷ Carolina Etnasari Anjaya and Yonatan Alex Arifianto, “Mengembangkan Misi Gereja Dalam Bingkai Moderasi Beragama,” *THRONOS: Jurnal Teologi Kristen* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1–10.

Indonesian context.⁸ Through moderation, individuals are not only able to respect existing diversity but also avoid radical and intolerant attitudes that can damage social solidarity.

Pancasila, Indonesia's foundation, has proven effective in uniting all religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural communities. One important step the government has taken to strengthen religious moderation is through education.⁹ Moderate religious education is believed to create a more inclusive understanding, increase tolerance, and reduce the potential for inter-religious conflict. The National Education System Law No. 20/2003 Article 37 Paragraph 2 emphasizes that religious, civic and language education must be an integral part of the national education curriculum, along with the aim of building Indonesian people with nationalist and moderate characters.¹⁰

Strengthening religious moderation through education must be carried out in a planned and systematic manner.¹¹ The results of Mayske Rinny's study emphasize that one important aspect in implementing religious moderation is the role of the principal as a leader responsible for creating an inclusive, safe and tolerant school environment.¹² Principals are not only education managers but also mentors, supervisors, and mediators who can foster awareness of the importance of religious moderation among students. In this context, school principals play a key role in shaping attitudes of tolerance among students and overcoming various problems that arise due to intolerance or religious differences.

This phenomenon is of concern to researchers who want to explore the principal's role in implementing moderate religious values. Ti Halimah and Siti Kulsum Marahma¹³ highlighted the role of the principal at SMAN 1 Simpang Kanan in implementing inclusive policies, such as fostering tolerance through routine activities and policies that

⁸ Pribadyo Prakosa, "Moderasi Beragama: Praksis Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama," *Jurnal Ilmiah Religiosity Entity Humanity (JIREH)* 4, no. 1 (2022): 45–55.

⁹ Ari Benawa, "Urgensi Dan Relevansi Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Dalam Pendidikan Agama Di Sekolah," *Pasupati* 8, no. 1 (2021): 65–84.

¹⁰ Presiden Republik Indonesia, "Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional," *Jakarta: Kementrian Riset, Teknologi, Dan Pendidikan Tinggi*, 2003.

¹¹ Riskun Iqbal, "Upaya Penguatan Kurikulum Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Moderasi Beragama," *Journal on Education* 5, no. 4 (2023): 17510–18.

¹² Mayske Rinny Liando and Hadirman Hadirman, "Praktik Kultur Moderasi Beragama Dalam Lembaga Pendidikan Muhammadiyah (Studi Di SMA Muhammadiyah Manado)," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, no. 01 (2022): 379–92.

¹³ Ti Halimah Ti Halimah and Siti Kulsum Marahma, "Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pembinaan Sikap Toleransi Beragama Di SMAN 1 Simpang Kanan Kab. Aceh Singkil," *Intelektualita* 11, no. 01 (2022).

respect diversity. Deti Rostini's research.¹⁴ Al-Huda Integrated Islamic Junior High School shows a more implicit application of religious moderation through religious value-based programs, with a focus on management and control. Meanwhile, Moh. Muslim¹⁵ identifies the madrasah principal's policy in developing the concept of religious moderation at MTs Maarif NU. Ahmad Saiful Bahrurruzi emphasizes the importance of school principals in building an inclusive culture and managing diversity despite facing challenges such as resistance to change.¹⁶ Research by Lalu Sirajul Hadi ¹⁷shows that transformative leadership in madrasah can create a harmonious atmosphere. These studies provide an overview of various approaches to the implementation of religious moderation in educational settings, with a focus that varies according to the school context.

This research focuses on the role of school principals in implementing religious moderation at the junior high school level in the Tanjung Beringin sub-district, with a sample of three schools (two public and one private). In contrast, some previous studies focused more on one school or Madrasah. In addition, this study describes the challenges and practical solutions faced by school principals in implementing religious moderation, providing a broader and contextual perspective across different types of schools in one sub-district.

This research aims to explore the role of school principals in implementing the values of religious moderation at the junior high school level, especially in the Tanjung Beringin sub-district. This research is expected to provide a clearer picture of the challenges faced by school principals in implementing religious moderation, as well as the solutions they take to maintain harmony in the school environment. Thus, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of educational policies that support religious moderation as an effort to strengthen unity in Indonesia.

¹⁴ Deti Rostini, Rifqi Zaeni Achmad Syam, and Willya Achmad, "The Significance of Principal Management on Teacher Performance and Quality of Learning," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 14, no. 2 (2022): 2513–20.

¹⁵ Moh Muslim and Mohammad Zaini, "Kebijakan Kombinatif Kepemimpinan Digital Kepala Sekolah Dasar Berbasis Teknologi Pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *TADRIS: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 16, no. 2 (2021): 286–300.

¹⁶ Ahmad Saiful Bahrurruzi et al., "Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meciptakan Budaya Belajar Yang Inklusif Di Lingkungan Sekolah Dasar SDIT Al Fahmi Kota Palu," *Jurnal Integrasi Manajemen Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (2024): 44–52.

¹⁷ Lalu Sirajul Hadi, "Staregi Kepemimpinan Kepala Madrasah Sebagai Agent of Change Dalam Mewujudkan Moderasi Beragama," *SOCIETY* 11, no. 2 (2020): 124–35.

Metodologi Penelitian

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a phenomenological type to explore and understand the educational phenomena that occur in three junior secondary schools (SMP) in the Tanjung Beringin sub-district.¹⁸ The qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen because it can provide a deep understanding of the educational context being studied. This approach allows researchers to explore various perspectives and experiences relevant to the problem being studied, allowing them to gain richer and more comprehensive insights into the factors that influence the dynamics of education at the junior secondary level.

This research was conducted in three junior high schools in the Tanjung Beringin sub-district: SMPN 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMPN 4 Tanjung Beringin and SMP Swasta Berdikari. These schools were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which considers the diversity of school characteristics, such as public and private status, as well as differences in education policies and socioeconomic conditions. The selection of this representative sample aims to ensure that the data obtained can accurately describe the education phenomenon in the area.

The data collection process used three main techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to capture direct interactions between teachers and students in the classroom and to understand the dynamics of learning. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, principals and students to explore their views on the factors that influence the education process. In addition, relevant documents, such as school annual reports, the implemented curriculum and education policies, were analyzed to provide additional context for the study.¹⁹ The collected data were then analyzed interactively and continuously, in accordance with the qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman, through three stages: data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing.”²⁰

Religious and School Diversity in Tanjung Beringin Sub-district

¹⁸ Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019).

¹⁹ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2018).

²⁰ Matthew B Milles and A Michael Huberman, “Analisis Data Kualitatif: Buku Sumber Tentang Metode-Metode Baru,” *Jakarta: UIP*, 1992.

Kecamatan Tanjung Beringin, located in Kabupaten Serdang Bedagai, has four public and two private junior high schools (SMP). These schools, as of the 2023/2024 academic year, reflect the diverse religious backgrounds of the student population, as shown in the following table. The role of school leadership, particularly school principals, is crucial in facilitating religious moderation among students. This study aims to examine the leadership practices in three schools, SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin, and SMP Swasta Berdikari, with a focus on the principal's role in implementing religious moderation in these educational settings.

Religious Diversity and Educational Practices

The demographic breakdown of students in the region shows a predominance of Muslim students, followed by a significant Christian population, with minimal representation from other religious groups; note the following table.

| No | Nama Sekolah | Islam | Kristen | Budha | Hindu | Total |
|--------------|-------------------------|-------------|------------|----------|----------|-------------|
| 1 | SMPN 1 Tanjung Beringin | 454 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 476 |
| 2 | SMPN 2 Tanjung Beringin | 14 | 299 | 0 | 0 | 313 |
| 3 | SMPN 3 Tanjung Beringin | 437 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 437 |
| 4 | SMPN 4 Tanjung Beringin | 85 | 106 | 0 | 0 | 191 |
| 5 | SMP Sw Berdikari | 158 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 163 |
| 6 | SMP Sw Pancasila | 241 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 241 |
| Total | | 1389 | 432 | 0 | 0 | 1821 |

This religious diversity demands efforts to promote religious moderation in order to maintain harmony and mutual respect for differences. The schools in this study have adopted various strategies to foster these values, with principals playing a pivotal role in ensuring the successful implementation of these strategies.

The Principal's Role in Religious Moderation

In the context of religious moderation, the principal's role goes beyond administrative duties and includes leadership in promoting respect, tolerance and understanding between religions. Findings from interviews with principals revealed four main roles they play in

creating a supportive environment for religious moderation: as managers, leaders, supervisors and administrators.

1. The Principal as a Manager

According to Handayani (2014), the principal's role as a manager involves managing resources and decision-making processes effectively and efficiently, including planning school programs. In this study, principals at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin, and SMP Swasta Berdikari implemented the “3S” smile, greeting, and salutation policy to promote an atmosphere of respect and harmony. This initiative has proven effective in shaping positive interactions between students and teachers, both inside and outside the school environment.”²¹

The implementation of this “3S” policy, as emphasized by the principal, aims to reduce potential conflicts and create a more inclusive environment where religious and cultural differences are respected. Morning greeting rituals, such as shaking hands between teachers and students, are designed to foster positive energy and interpersonal connections and set the tone for a school day of respect and cooperation.²² These actions are in line with the principles of religious moderation that emphasize mutual respect and understanding among diverse groups.

In line with the above findings, Hasan Albana's research confirms that the practice of prayer before lessons is also in line with the principles of religious moderation by providing space for individual expression while fostering collective unity. Each student is encouraged to pray according to their religious beliefs, which contributes to the creation of a peaceful and respectful learning environment.²³

The introduction of scheduled religious activities, such as collective prayers and religious services, at SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin demonstrates the principal's commitment to integrating religious moderation into the school's daily life. These activities not only accommodate students' religious needs but also encourage them to understand and respect religious diversity.

²¹ H Yani, “Peran Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pembiasaan Beragama Dan Berbudi Pekerti Siswa,” *Mudarrisa: Jurnal Kajian Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2015): 168–93.

²² Halimah and Marahma, “Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Pembinaan Sikap Toleransi Beragama Di SMAN 1 Simpang Kanan Kab. Aceh Singkil.”

²³ Hasan Albana, “Implementasi Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Di Sekolah Menengah Atas,” *Jurnal SMART (Studi Masyarakat, Religi, Dan Tradisi)* 9, no. 1 (2023): 49–64.

This research shows that the “3S” policy implemented by principals in the three schools studied smile, greet, and say hello is in line with the findings of Handayani and Hasan Albana, who emphasized the importance of effective management in facilitating an environment that supports religious moderation. Handayani explained that principals should be able to create a conducive atmosphere for students from various backgrounds, one of which is through resource management and activity planning that prioritizes inclusive values and tolerance. The “3S” policy implemented in SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin, and SMP Swasta Berdikari is a practical manifestation of this theory, which prioritizes the importance of positive interactions and respect for diversity in creating a harmonious learning environment.

2. Principal as Leader

The role of the principal as a leader is crucial in ensuring that religious moderation values are embedded in the school culture. Research conducted in Tanjung Beringin shows that principals in SMP Negeri 1, SMP Negeri 4, and SMP Swasta Berdikari effectively adopt leadership practices that promote justice and wisdom by treating all students and staff equally, regardless of their religious background.

This is in line with the findings of Efendi,²⁴ Who asserted that effective school leadership should reflect inclusiveness, fairness and respect for diversity. The principals in this study have demonstrated these qualities through regular communications, such as the weekly flag ceremony, where they emphasize the importance of respect for religious differences and shared understanding. In addition, Indra Haryanto's findings confirm that regular meetings with students, teachers and staff allow principals to address issues of diversity and moderation directly, creating an environment where open communication is encouraged. This democratic leadership approach ensures that all members of the school community feel heard and valued, which is essential for the successful implementation of religious moderation.²⁵

²⁴ Pitri Maharani Efendi, Tatang Muhtar, and Yusuf Tri Herlambang, “Relevansi Kurikulum Merdeka Dengan Konsepsi Ki Hadjar Dewantara: Studi Kritis Dalam Perspektif Filosofis-Pedagogis,” *Jurnal Elementaria Edukasia* 6, no. 2 (2023): 548–61, <https://doi.org/10.31949/jee.v6i2.5487>.

²⁵ Indra Haryanto Sindang Lurah and Haryanto Haryanto, “Peran Kepala Sekolah Dalam Penerapan Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah (MBS) Di SDIT Jabal Nur Gamping, Sleman,” *Jurnal Akuntabilitas Manajemen Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (2014): 174–87.

In particular, the findings of this study also corroborate Efendi's findings, which emphasize that leadership that is inclusive, fair and respectful of religious diversity is a key factor in creating a harmonious and moderate school environment. This research shows that the principal in Tanjung Beringin adopts a democratic leadership style, with open communication and policies that ensure all students and staff, regardless of religious background, feel valued. This approach reflects the principles of inclusiveness Efendi put forward, where a diversity-oriented leadership approach can create mutual respect and reduce tensions between religious groups.

3. Principal as Supervisor

One of the roles of the school principal is to ensure that the education process is in line with the values of religious moderation. The principals in this study were actively involved in coaching and supporting teachers, ensuring that their teaching practices were inclusive and respectful of all religious backgrounds. By creating an equitable teaching environment, principals contribute to the development of an inclusive school culture where all students feel valued and respected. The principal's commitment to monitoring the attitudes and behaviors of staff and students, ensuring that discriminatory practices do not arise, reinforces the principles of fairness and inclusiveness. Efforts to prevent bias and ensure fair treatment of all students are essential in maintaining a harmonious and inclusive educational environment.

The principals' approach to conflict resolution, which emphasizes mediation and dialogue, is another example of their supervisory role in promoting religious moderation. This approach is in line with Puji Lestari's research,²⁶ Which highlights the importance of democratic decision-making and community involvement in promoting religious tolerance and moderation in schools.

4. Principal as Administrator

As an administrator, the principal is responsible for overseeing the smooth operation of school activities and ensuring that policies are implemented effectively. In the context of religious moderation, this includes managing the school curriculum, extracurricular activities and community relations. The principal is responsible for

²⁶ Puji Lestari, Ujang Efendi, and Hasan Hariri, "Implementasi Peran Kepala Sekolah Sebagai Pemimpin Pendidikan Dalam Melakukan Manajemen Perubahan," *Jurnal Manajemen Mutu Pendidikan* 10, no. 1 (2022).

ensuring that the school environment supports the learning process for all students, regardless of their religious background.

At SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin and SMP Swasta Berdikari, principals integrate religious activities such as prayer and community service into the school schedule, ensuring that these activities are accessible to all students. In addition, the principal oversees the administration of extracurricular activities, such as the scouting program, which promotes tolerance, cooperation and mutual respect among students from different religious backgrounds.

The effectiveness of this administrative approach model is in line with Ayuningtyas's research.²⁷ and Habiby,²⁸ Who argues that school leadership plays an important role in creating an environment that supports religious diversity and builds an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding? This study also shows that principals are responsible for managing various administrative activities that support religious moderation, such as integrating prayer and social service activities into the school schedule and extracurricular activities that support tolerance among students from different religious backgrounds.

The principal's role in initiating the implementation of religious moderation in schools is very diverse, including management, leadership, supervision and administration. Principals at SMP Negeri 1 Tanjung Beringin, SMP Negeri 4 Tanjung Beringin and SMP Swasta Berdikari have demonstrated a strong commitment to creating an inclusive school environment that promotes respect, tolerance and understanding among students from different religious backgrounds. Emphasize the importance of school leadership in shaping an inclusive and harmonious educational environment. By integrating religious moderation into the school's daily practices and facilitating open communication, this principal contributes to the development of a more inclusive, tolerant and respectful society.

In the context of science development, especially the implementation of religious moderation in education. This research makes an important contribution to the existing literature on religious moderation in Indonesian schools. By exploring the

²⁷ Dian Ayuningtyas, "Peranan Kepemimpinan Kepala Sekolah Dalam Meningkatkan Kinerja Guru," *At-Ta'dib: Jurnal Ilmiah Prodi Pendidikan Agama Islam*, 2017, 1–29.

²⁸ Wahdan Najib Habiby, "Manajemen Adaptasi Pembelajaran Kurikulum 2013 Ke Kurikulum 2006 (KTSP) Pada Siswa Kelas I SDN Sondakan Surakarta," *Profesi Pendidikan Dasar* 4, no. 2 (2017): 180–89.

role of school principals in implementing religious moderation policies at the junior high school level, this research enriches our understanding of how schools in religiously diverse areas can create an inclusive educational environment.

In addition, this research also contributes to the theory of transformational leadership in education. Transformational leadership prioritizes positive change and empowerment of staff and students to achieve a common goal, in this case, creating inclusive and moderate schools. The findings show that principals who adopt a transformational leadership approach through open communication, inclusive planning and managing activities that support diversity succeed in creating an atmosphere that supports religious moderation. Principals, as transformational leaders, play a role in inspiring change in a more tolerant and respectful school culture.

This research enriches the understanding of the principal's role as a key instrument in building a moderate and inclusive educational environment. Drawing on theories of educational management, inclusive leadership and educational administration, the findings provide practical guidance for principals and educators in designing policies and practices that support religious moderation in Indonesian schools. The research also demonstrates the importance of integrating religious moderation policies and practices in the daily life of schools, which can serve as a model for other schools in areas with similar religious diversity.

Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that principals in junior high schools in Tanjung Beringin sub-district have carried out their roles effectively in implementing religious moderation in the following ways: As a Manager, the principal organizes school activities with inclusive policies, such as facilitating prayers according to their respective beliefs, applying the 3S principle (Smile, Salam, and Sapa), all students are required to participate in scout activities, and supporting participation in Islamic religious activities. As a Leader, the principal provides direction and advice through regular flag ceremonies and holds monthly meetings with the school community to listen and solve problems together. As a Supervisor, the principal supervises and ensures there is no disrespect among school members, thus maintaining a harmonious atmosphere. As Administrator, the principal ensures that religious rights and obligations are fulfilled and works with the community to maintain a conducive and comfortable school environment.

Overall, the principal contributes significantly to creating a tolerant and harmonious school environment through the implementation of fair and inclusive policies and close supervision of attitudes and interactions in the school.

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