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# THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN FORMING TOLERANT INDIVIDUALS

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## Abstract

*This article discusses the role of religious education in shaping and developing the attitude of tolerance in the context of Indonesia's diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion. It argues that in a multi-religious society such as Indonesia, education should provide an overview and moral ideals of religion contextually. Educational process thus requires a review of rigid and less humanist religious doctrines that have been held so far. The plurality of religions and beliefs are no longer understood as the potential for unrest, but the potential to implement their teachings for the sake of humanity. It further argues that education has an important role to play in fostering early attitude, not only in accepting the existence of other religions, but also in cooperating with those who have different beliefs or religions. This means that education should enable the growth of the brotherhood in unity, so people can jointly build the world a new which is more meaningful for all humanity. Educational design should accommodate pluralist and tolerant attitude. This requires learning materials and teachers' attitudes which are tolerant and pluralist as well.*

**Keywords:** Religious Education, Diversity, Pluralism, Tolerance.

## A. Introduction

Indonesia is a pluralistic and multicultural nation, inhabited by a variety of races, ethnicities, cultures and religions. This natural diversity will be a valuable manifestation when properly directed toward a conducive condition. On the contrary, when it is not directed to the proper pattern, this diversity will lead to a clash of civilizations, often resulted in bloody conflicts, which creates disunity and social disintegration.

With the diversity of race, ethnicity, culture, and religion, education should provide an overview and moral ideals of religion contextually. Educational process thus requires a review of rigid and less humanist religious doctrines that have been held so far. The plurality of religions and beliefs are no longer understood as the potential for unrest, but the potential to implement their teachings for the sake of humanity. All religions should claim to build a civilization, peace and human safety.

Education has an important role to play in fostering early attitude, not only in accepting the existence of other religions, but also in cooperating with those who have different beliefs or religions. This means that education should enable the growth of the brotherhood in unity, so people can jointly build the world a new which is more meaningful for all humanity. Educational design should accommodate pluralist and tolerant attitude. This requires learning materials and teachers attitudes which are tolerant and pluralist as well.

Education is the process by which the nation prepares its young generation to live its life. Education is the process of sowing the seeds of cultural and human life bounded by the values or visions that are developing and developed in a society. As such, education is a cultural process.<sup>1</sup>

character and dignity of the nation in the context of educating the life of the nation. It aims to develop students' potentials to become men of

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<sup>1</sup> HAR Tilaar, *Education, Culture and Civil Society of Indonesia*, (Bandung: Remaja Rosdakarya, 1999), p 9.

faith who are fearful of God Almighty, noble, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and become citizens who are tolerant, democratic and accountable.

Ideally, education, especially religious education, offers a powerful and accurate solutions to solve various instances of religion-based violence. Education is considered to have a noble role in human history. Education is also understood as an effective means of providing various provisions of life for learners, means of educating individuals of society, state and nation. This means that in interreligious relations, values of peace, tolerance, inclusion and harmony can be instilled in the nation's youth through education. In this sense, education is the "commander" in shaping the nation's civilization and character as well as in forming tolerant personalities.

Ironically, the fact is quite the opposite; educational institutions are "accused" as the primary cause of various cases of violence in the name of religion in the community. In fact, "in recent years, occur a lot of conflicts, intolerance, and violence in the name of religion". Religious outlook that tends to be *anachronistic* is indeed potentially divisive, giving rise to various kinds of conflict and tolerance".<sup>2</sup> In this position, religious education is accused of becoming the printing machine of "intolerance" and "radicalism" of learners. Religion education has not provided a concrete solution to the formation of open and civilized attitude in coming to terms with diversity in the community. Religious education in schools have not been oriented yet toward the level of moral *action-psychomotor*, so that learners do not just stop at the level of competence, but also have the will and habit in realizing values in everyday life or "being".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Values of tolerance as the basis of peace, posted by Hana Mustaqim, quoted from <http://yhanamedjaya.blogspot.co.id/2014/10/nilai-nilai-toleransi-sebagai-kerangka.html>, accessed on Friday November 13, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Hujair AH Sanaky, *Renewal of Islamic Education: Paradigm, Typology, and Mapping Towards Indonesian Civil Society* (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2015), p. 205.

## **B. Role of Religious Education**

If referring to the law, the function and purpose of religion and religious education has been formulated ideally. The Government Regulation No. 55 year 2007 article 2 verses 1 and 2 explain that: religious education functions to form Indonesian man who is faithful and devoted to God Almighty and has a noble character and able to maintain peace and harmony of inter religious relationships. The objective of religious education is to develop the ability of learners to understand, appreciate and practice the values that harmonize religion mastery in science, technology and art.

Education is basically an effort to develop the potential of human resources with the learning process. Education is a conscious and deliberate effort to achieve learning and the learning process so that learners effectively develop their potentials to have spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, morality and skills beneficial for themselves, the community and the state. This means that education is all efforts in developing the physical and spiritual potentials toward perfection.<sup>4</sup>

Religion education is an education that provides knowledge and shapes the attitude, personality, and skills of learners in the practice of religious teachings, carried out at least through the subjects/courses at all levels and types of education. "Religious education" meanwhile is education that prepares students to be able to play a role that requires the mastery of knowledge about the teaching of religion and/or become a theologian and practice the teachings of his religion.<sup>5</sup>

The implementation of the existing education, especially religious education, has not provided a concrete solution to the formation of

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<sup>4</sup> "The definition of religion education, religious education and Islamic education", quoted from <http://zonependidikan.blogspot.co.id/2012/06/definisi-pondidikan-agama-pendidikan.html>, accessed on Tuesday, November 17, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Indonesian Government Regulation No. 55 Year 2007 regarding Religion Education and Religious Education, cited from <http://kemenag.go.id/file/dokumen/PP5507.pdf> on Tuesday, November 17, 2015.

the open attitude toward diversity and differences in the community. Some of the events are motivated by differences of race, culture and religion as well as among groups which is a decision that God sets for this country can be an indication of the failure of religious education in instilling the values of peaceful teachings of Islam. The community has not been able to tolerate cultural differences encountered in the process of social interaction among various communities. Differences that are essentially a positive value for the Indonesian nation has been polluted by flammable society's emotions and destructive behaviours that blindly solve a problem.

We all agree that religious education needs to be addressed and completely deconstructed from various aspects. In other words, there is a need for deradicalization of religious education. For example, the philosophy of religious education that only justifies its own religion, without being willing to accept the truth of another religion, need to be criticized and subsequently re-oriented. Learning materials in religious education that are still trapped in the *truth claim* and binary construction of belief vs disbelief, Muslim vs non-Muslim they are very influential in shaping the way people conceive other religions need to be dismantled from the view of learners to be further contextualized with global issues such as human rights, democracy, climate change, and others. That way, they will not form an absurd reasoning for religious communities.

A study conducted by the Kompas daily news, by analyzing textbooks of religious studies, reported that the portion of "religious tolerance" in textbooks are not so widely discussed. The subjects of Islamic Religious Education are found only in junior high school third grade books compiled by the Directorate of Islamic Religious Education in the public schools of the country. Instead, textbooks are more dominated by the fundamental teachings of the principles of beliefs and practical knowledge of all sorts as well as "administration

of religious rites” which are intended to reinforce the confidence of learners towards their religious affiliation.<sup>6</sup>

This indicates that religious education taught in school is more directed toward the formation of individuals who tend to be exclusive and do not have social sensitivity over their differences and isolated with the diversity of socio-cultural life of Indonesia. In this case, it is clear that religious education in Indonesia stresses more on the normative discipline and far from the reality of life that is heterogeneous.<sup>7</sup>

### C. Formation of Tolerant Individuals

In the opening of the 1945 Constitution, Article 29 paragraph 2 states that “*The State guarantees the freedom of each citizen to profess his own religion and to worship according to their religion or belief.*” Citizens are thus expected to hold high the attitude of tolerance and respect between different religious communities for the unity of the State.

Tolerance develops within the framework of diversity, primarily religious and cultural diversity including, traditions or customs that accompany it. Tolerant is defined as two different groups interacting with each other; while to tolerate is to let or to allow.<sup>8</sup> Tolerance is thus an attitude of mutual respect for groups or individuals in the community or in other environments. As such, “tolerant” is defined as an attitude of “respecting others”, appreciating, and allowing them to have something different, be that in the aspect of religion, belief, culture, ethnicity, opinions, and so on which are different from himself. This attitude in the context of education should be developed and constructed in the learning materials as well as education and the learning process.

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<sup>6</sup> Fauzi Muhamad, "The Role of Islamic Religious Teacher in Delivering Harmony in Diversity", available at [http://mufazi881.blogspot.co.id/2012/12/peran-guru-agama-islam-menghadirkan\\_9536.html](http://mufazi881.blogspot.co.id/2012/12/peran-guru-agama-islam-menghadirkan_9536.html), accessed on Wednesday, November 4, 2015

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Language Centre of the Ministry of Education, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, available at <http://pusatbahasa.diknas.go.id/KBBI/index.php>, accessed on Saturday, September 26, 2009

Education is expected to create a tolerant society with the following characteristics; *first*, the highly respect and allow others to have different belief, faith, and religion; *second*, they respect and tolerate others to have different or dissenting opinions. Measurable indicators include: (a) tolerant attitude toward the choices and ways of expressing with others in worship according to their religion and belief; (b) awareness in understanding, acknowledging and respecting the diversity of religions and beliefs; (c) a united attitude in diversity, agreement in disagreement, and so on.

Tolerance can be realized by all members of society from all walks of life, thus forming a community that is *rahmatan lil 'ālaīmin*, namely a peaceful and safe society, compact but diverse and rich with ideas. According to Juwono Sudarsono, apart from tolerance, the attitude of compromise should also be developed in the educational process.<sup>9</sup> Also important is “mutual understanding” that needs to be developed in the educational process, so that the difference of opinion and views become “mercy” and “wisdom” to shape a society that has open insight and horizon, rich with diversity, and adequate social insight.

Therefore, the process of religious education is expected to accommodate this position, thus forming a culture of tolerance, mutual respect, allowing others to have different views, religions, beliefs, and so forth, as a manifestation of Islamic values (the divine values), which are applicable in everyday life, to realize the world that is merciful for the universe (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*).<sup>10</sup>

The concept of religious education can realize highly appreciative stance towards human dignity by developing empathy, upholding the values of humanity, recognizing the equal rights and obligations of human beings, and tolerance. The concept of religious education is expected to accommodate these values in curriculum design

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<sup>9</sup> Juwono Sudarsono, *ICWA*, discussion about “*The Development of Education and Civil Society*”, Jakarta: March 9, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Hujair AH. Sanaky, *Renewal of Islamic Education: Paradigm, Typology, and Mapping Towards Indonesian Civil Society*, First edition, (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2015), p. 167-168.

and learning process. The indicators are: (a) to express the value of tolerance, humanity (humanism), love of human beings as servants of God, like to do humanitarian activities; (b) to realize attitudes and behaviour that recognize equality in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, class, recognize the equality of rights and obligations as servants of God, fellow members of culturally diverse society, ethnic communities, ethnicity, and religion, both at the local and global level.

Educational institutions are the most appropriate vehicle for the formation of values of tolerance and togetherness, and the best place to train and simultaneously apply these values in life. The process of education should be capable of developing all potentials of learners to appreciate differences of opinion (the right to be different); freedom to actualize themselves; intellectual freedom; the opportunity to compete in the self-realization; education that builds morale, education that is getting closer to the Creator.<sup>11</sup>

Religious education curriculum needs to synchronize the learning process-that are oriented towards culture formation and tolerant behaviour. It must be designed to develop the culture of tolerance in all aspects of society, appreciate differentness, cultivate the spirit of pluralism, as well as practices that touch on human beings, whether political, social or cultural, and develop the concept of education to appreciate the potential of civilized man.

Departing from this view, resolving the issue of intolerance in young people in schools or higher education institutions must be preceded by redesigning the curriculum with the perspective of a pluralist, tolerant and multicultural curriculum. In practice, however, there is a gap between curriculum and educators as if they are not interrelated. Seeing such realities, the author still believes that although the curriculum is designed to be anti-tolerance, if it is run by a teacher who is pluralist, the messages delivered will be pluralist as well and vice versa.

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<sup>11</sup> Diding Nurdin, "Education Reform Towards Civil Society" available at <http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com/prprint.php?mib=beritadetail&id=34248>, accessed on Friday, 02/06/2009

The development of attitudes and togetherness among students should be laid as one of the fundamental parts of the education and learning process in schools. In this context, learning materials or curriculum of religious education that are based on tolerance and learning process for tolerance development are critically needed. Teachers in the learning process occupy a very important position since the learning process is very much influenced by the design of learning programs conducted or made by teachers. For tolerance to be developed among students, teachers should be able to design an activity of learning that affect the development of this attitude.

For example, teachers' religious understanding is more reflected in their lessons and contributes to the growing conservatism and religious radicalism in society, especially among young people. Therefore, the author holds that the efforts to deradicalize religious education will not be significant or even meaningless if they are not balanced with the readiness of religious teachers (as implementers and teaching designers), both in the aspect of their religious paradigm and the method of teaching; from indoctrination to dialogue. Unfortunately, as noted above, the teacher's aspect is barely noticed as an urgent matter to be addressed.

#### **D. Efforts that Should be Made**

To create and develop religious teachers who have pluralist and tolerant perspective requires a long process because this is related to changes in mindset. But in the short term, according to Ahmad Asroni as quoted Indriyani Maṛrifah, there are several ways that can be taken, namely: **First**, conducting intensively variety of trainings, workshops, seminars and other activities of enhancing tolerance, multicultural and pluralist awareness for educators/ teachers. **Second**, organizing religious dialogue with religious educators and leaders or other faiths. In so doing, educators of different religions can mingle and get to know each other. This in turn will give birth to the attitude of appreciation

and tolerance to other religions. *Third*, introducing reading materials or various references of tolerance and multicultural education from an early age to educators.<sup>12</sup>

Another important step is that the recruitment of new teachers must promote the religious perspective of prospective teachers which is pluralist and tolerant. Managing the teacher problem at the root level (via a tight selection) would not only effective but also efficient in solving the problem of intolerance of religious teachers. If such activities are carried out intensely and seriously, even though they are not easy, it will give space for the changes of mindset of teachers; from anti-pluralist to pluralist and tolerant.

From the frame of thought above, to achieve tolerance education, education in schools needs to be oriented at the level of moral *action-psychomotor*, so that learners do not just stop at the competence, but also have the will and habit in realizing values in everyday life or “being”. Lickona argues that educating children’s morality up to the required moral *action-psychomotor* requires three sustainable development processes, from the process of *moral knowing*, *moral feeling*, through a *moral action*.

All three must be developed in an integrated and balanced way,<sup>13</sup> so that the potentials of learners can develop optimally in the following aspects: (a) intellectual intelligence, have intelligence an ability to distinguish between “good” and bad, right and wrong, and determine which are helpful; (b) emotional intelligence, the ability to control emotions, appreciate differences, understand the feelings of others, able to work with others; (c) social intelligence, having the ability to communicate, be happy to help, make friends, enjoy working together, happy to do to please others; (d) spiritual intelligence, have a graceful faith, feel always watched by God, like to do good for God, discipline

<sup>12</sup> Indriyani Ma'rifah, *Reconstruction of Islamic Education: An Effort to Build Awareness for Reducing Terrorism and Islamic Radicalism*, p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 53.

in worship, patient, honest, thankful and grateful; (e) kinesthetics intelligence, creating concern for himself and others, accept differences, etc.<sup>14</sup> Individuals who develop this range of intelligences will develop a tolerant behaviour.

Facts of religious intolerance and violence that occurred in the community as described above shows that it is not easy to remove beliefs with religious symbols to violence. Solution for problems of intolerance and religious violence need to be found fundamentally by considering the causes and the weaknesses of the concept that has been done so far. New ideas are needed to give a better solution for the future. Thus religious teachings whose primary mission is to be a mercy for the universe and peace can realize a tolerant society in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious and plural country.

Education, especially religious education, is considered to have not been able to propagate the values of tolerance in society. Whereas in a very pluralistic society such as Indonesia, religious education should provide an overview and moral ideals of religion contextually. Here it is necessary to review the rigid religious doctrines. As with the doctrine of jihad, it is no longer understood as the consent of Islam to use violence in spreading religion. The plurality of religions and beliefs is no longer understood as a potential riot, but rather a potential to be invited to carry out the teachings for the benefit of humanity. Because all religions always claim for peace and human safety.

Observing this fact, the reconstruction of religious education is very critical in addressing the problem of intolerance that often arise. Religious education should enable the growth of brotherhood in the togetherness, so that it can together build a new world that is more meaningful to all human beings. It will all be realized if the revival of religious education towards the pluralist and tolerant is balanced with the religious teachers who are tolerant and pluralist as well.

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<sup>14</sup> See Hujair AH. Sanaky, *Renewal of Islamic Education: Paradigm, Typology, and Mapping Towards Indonesian Civil Society*, First edition, (Yogyakarta: Kaukaba Dipantara, 2015), p. 205.

## E. Conclusion

In a very diverse society such as Indonesia, education must provide a contextual picture of the moral and religious ideals. Education has an important role to foster the attitude of tolerance and accepting differences as well as working with different religious beliefs.

Religious education should enable the growth of the brotherhood in unity, so community can jointly build a new world civilization that is more meaningful for all humanity. It will all be possible if the design of religious education accommodates pluralist and tolerant outlook that is balanced with religious teachers who are tolerant and pluralist as well.

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