Moderate character education in a multireligious region: an informal approach to religious moderation

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Abstract Teenagers as a big part in this country have an important role in building a safe and peaceful life amidst religious differences. Therefore, moderate character must be instilled in adolescents from an early age. This study examines how character education efforts are made for youth in multi-religious areas and what steps can be taken so that moderate character education can be accepted by the millennial generation. This study aims to reveal character education efforts in multi-religious areas and to design a new approach to character education for the millennial generation. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation and interviews. Adolescents from different religious backgrounds are gathered in one location to be trained in the understanding and acceptance of religious differences. The results of this study indicate that youth character education in multi-religious areas can be carried out using an informal approach through camps and youth-based activities such as games between heterogeneous groups of adolescents.

Keywords: Character, Youth, Moderate, Multireligious areas

Abstrak Remaja sebagai bagian besar di negeri ini mempunyai peran penting dalam membangun kehidupan yang aman dan damai di tengah perbedaan agama. Oleh karena itu, karakter moderat harus ditanamkan pada remaja sejak dini. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana upaya pendidikan karakter yang dilakukan bagi generasi muda di wilayah multi agama dan langkah apa saja yang dapat dilakukan agar pendidikan karakter moderat dapat diterima oleh generasi milenial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap upaya pendidikan karakter di wilayah multi agama dan merancang pendekatan baru pendidikan karakter bagi generasi milenial. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi dan wawancara. Remaja yang berbeda latar belakang agama dikumpulkan dalam satu lokasi untuk dilatih pemahaman dan penerimaan terhadap perbedaan agama. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan karakter remaja di wilayah multi agama dapat dilakukan dengan pendekatan informal melalui perkemahan dan kegiatan berbasis remaja seperti permainan antar kelompok remaja yang heterogen.

Kata Kunci : Moderat, Daerah Multi-agama, Karakter, Remaja

Introduction

Moderate character education, especially in adolescents, has not yet become an important agenda in socializing religious moderation. Elvinaro and Syarif stated that the important role of the millennial generation has not received more space in the socialization of religious moderation (Elvinaro & Syarif, 2021). The existence of youth as the next generation of the nation, which amounts to almost half of Indonesia's population, needs to be optimized by educating moderate character. Why does character education need to be done for teenagers in multi-religious areas? Of course this is a must considering that Indonesia is a country with a diversity of ethnicities, religions, cultures and customs. This condition requires an attitude that accepts differences, accepts the presence of other people in a harmonious life together.

The penetration of religious radicalism and religious radicalism in society is happening so quickly (Paradise & Grace, 2021), and continues to increase (Setara Institute, 2017) including in adolescents. In accordance with PPIM's research results, it shows that there are still many school-age adolescents who have radical views. This is shown by the map of student radicalism and intolerance opinions spread across various regions in Indonesia which shows that teenagers have quite high radicalism and intolerance opinions. They have views that tend to be radical. With a percentage that exceeds half of the total respondents, namely 58.5%. While those who have a moderate attitude is only 20.1% (Nisa et al., 2018).

Not to mention the findings about textbooks in the school environment which turned out to be intolerant. As Suharto cited the Syarif Hidayatullah UIN PPIM report which wrote reports of intolerant content in textbooks, among others, this was reflected in the form of blaming different opinions or religious practices (Suharto, 2017). Likewise, Hasniati (2017) stated that there are values of radicalism in PAI textbooks published by the Ministry of Education and Culture and other publishers. In terms of religion, Pujiono mentioned that there had been an increase in religious intolerance among students (Pujiono et al., 2019). Not to mention the potential for the development of radical understanding in tertiary institutions as a place for recruiting radical activists from the campus world as stated by Effendi et.al, 2020)

So, do not be surprised if there are still many radical behaviors and vandalism that occur among school-age adolescents, such as brawls, bullying, fights, and others, both within the school, family and community environment. This could be due to the fading of religious understanding in adolescents (Umar et al., 2020). Data obtained from the Data Bank of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) states that in the 2016-2020 range there were 329 cases of child/student brawls, then there were 437 cases of Children Perpetrating Violence in schools, not to mention cases dealing with the law which reached 6500 case. (https://bankdata.kpai.go.id/tabulation-data/data-case-pengjuangan-anak2016-2020). This shows that teenagers, especially at school age, are still vulnerable to acts of violence. Of course this is a reason why it is important to provide moderate character education to adolescents.

The diversity that exists in Indonesian society has the potential to cause conflict. This needs to be turned into a positive potential. One of the efforts that can be made to turn the threat of conflict into a positive opportunity is to provide an understanding of the values of religious moderation in adolescents. Moderate character education can be carried out by instilling

religious moderation values with indicators: national commitment and love for the Republic of Indonesia, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation for local culture (Ministry of Religion, 2019). This effort is believed to be able to reduce the potential for conflict in a pluralistic Indonesian society.

Until now, religious values have been the focus of studies by researchers with good offers to build moderate character in adolescents. For example, some studies offer optimization of religious education for adolescents in formal schools (Idris et.al, 2021; Wijaya et.al, 2021). Then, several other researchers review that Islamic boarding schools can be a good place for fostering moderate character in adolescents (Akrim et.al, 2022; Zakariyah et.al, 2022). Several others see that higher education can play an optimal role in building moderate character in students (Nasir et.al, 2021; Jamilah, 2021). Unfortunately, the distribution of research locations that shows a lot of information about moderate character development in a multicultural environment in multicultural activities with different religions is still minimal.

Therefore, unlike previous studies, this article focuses on moderate character development among adolescents in multicultural locations in Indonesia. This location really wants adolescents to have moderate character. For adolescents who live in areas whose population consists of adherents of different religions or multi-religion such as the city of Manado, this effort must be carried out with various approaches. In addition to formal approaches such as religious education and civic education, morals and character in the school environment, character education for adolescents needs to be carried out using an informal approach, namely by providing the instillation of religious moderation values outside of school (Shidiq et al., 2018).

Miklikowska (2010) emphasized that one of the most important character developments is promoting the inculcation of peaceful values through education. Moderate character who is not extreme, is in the middle, and does not take sides, will make life run fairly, safely and peacefully. For adolescents, which in the context of this study is defined as adolescence in English and adolescere in Latin, the noun is adolescentia which means youth which means growing into an adult, has a commonly used adolescent age limit between the ages of 12 to 21 years (Santrock, 2007). : 26), moderate character education is important so that they do not have a tendency to be radical and extreme in various ways.

They need to be given a correct understanding of the concept of religion which actually leads to a peaceful life, religion for harmony, not religion for conflict, which negates the existence of other people, or a way of religion that is intolerant and a source of conflict. Even though the potential for conflict is a latent threat in a multicultural society like Indonesia (Iqbal, 2014; Umar, 2017). In fact, religion should be a solution to conflict. Religion must avoid conflict and violence and respect and value others so that a peaceful coexistence can be realized. In addition, youth with mastery of digital media also need to be given conciliatory religious literacy so that they become pioneers of religious harmony through their social media posts.

Based on the consideration of the urgency of moderate character among adolescents, the question arises as to what efforts or steps can be taken to provide moderate character education. Of the four indicators of religious moderation, the authors choose and focus on two indicators, namely tolerance and non-violence. The goal is that teenagers can avoid violence and intolerance.

Methods

Referring to Sugiyono's opinion (2011), this research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods on phenomena that appear during the research. The design of this field research is designed with social activities and experiences in a miniature multi-religious environment. The miniature environment in question is a camp site for teenagers who come from different religious backgrounds and then gather in several camp tents. Researchers observed and analyzed the interactions of adolescents in the environment. Therefore, to obtain data in this study, researchers used participant interaction observation techniques, interviews, and documentation.

Referring to Cresswell's opinion (2010), that a qualitative study must have a clear procedure, this research procedure takes three important stages. This stage begins with grouping teenagers. Researchers collected participant data from teenagers from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. They are grouped into heterogeneous groups of different religions in camping tents, so that one tent will contain youth from different religions. In the next stage, the researchers gave each youth the opportunity to get to know each other and interact for 2 days. The results of the interaction were shared with all the youth who were present at the youth camp in a sharing experience so that one another could learn from each other's experiences. In the next stage, the researcher interviewed youth representatives to find out what understanding was gained from different religions and what lessons could be taken from life with different people. The informants of this study were youth from the mosque, youth from the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM), Confucian, Hindu and Buddhist youth. Researchers also interviewed youth and youth leaders from the religion. All informants knew that they were involved in research and provided information voluntarily.

Results and Discussion

Geographically, Manado City is located in the northern part of Sulawesi. The territorial boundaries of Manado City are bordered by other regencies and cities, namely to the north by North Minahasa Regency and the Mantehage Strait, to the east by Minahasa Regency, to the south by Minahasa Regency and to the west by Manado Bay.

Manado City community consists of various groups of people from ethnic and religious origins who become one in social interaction. The tribes and ethnicities that exist include Minahasa, Gorontalo, Sangihe and Talaud, Bolaang Mongondow, as well as immigrant tribes such as Arab, Chinese, Bugis-Makassar, Javanese and Sumatran (Supriati & Umar, 2018). Meanwhile, according to BPS data, the population of Manado based on religion is: 38.47% Muslim, 55.57% Protestant, 4.94% Catholic, 0.22% Hindu, 0.12% Buddhist, and 0.04% Confucianism.

The diversity of religions embraced by the people of the city of Manado makes this area a multi-religious area with a mix of different people in various layers of society. Association and interaction between followers of religions is common in multi-religious areas. This needs to be considered and maintained as a community asset, so that this pluralistic life can be maintained within the framework of a harmonious and peaceful life.

The results of this study indicate that efforts to moderate character education for adolescents in the city of Manado can be carried out with informal activities that are in

accordance with the interests and world of youth. Through youth camps of different religions, many things were obtained, for example, the establishment of communication between youth of different religions in more depth about interfaith knowledge and some religious terms in each religion.

The opinion of one of the mosque's youth, Rio Wahyudi, who was interviewed, stated that they benefit from interfaith youth camps with openness between people. *"We feel closer to friends of different religions, it turns out that we can communicate further about religious issues that we don't know about, and we can be open. We can talk and know what is permissible and what is not permissible for other people's religious teachings, and vice versa. For me this is very positive."*

Likewise Kezia's statement from GMIM Eben Haezer Church Youth who said she was happy with this experience. *"Meeting and living with friends of different religions like this makes us know that we can live in diversity. I also know that what people say that Islam is a scary religion, terrorists, etc. are all wrong."*

Confucian youth and Hindu youth who took part in the youth camp also said they were happy to get to know each other. The results of interviews with Confucian and Hindu Youth stated that: *"One thing that is unique to me is that I can learn to say Muslim greetings in Arabic and know what they mean, I also teach them to give greetings as is usually said in our religion and then we explain the meaning"*.

In addition, every teenager can experience positive interactions when they are together in social activities. This can be seen in the character building activities, where all blend into one regardless of differences in religion, ethnicity, and class. Activities such as group games and building togetherness make every teenager, even though they have different religions, can help and help each other.

One of the participants from the Christian Youth Community, Christian Bagensa, in an interview, expressed his high appreciation for character building activities that present a spirit of cooperation regardless of differences in religion and other backgrounds.

> *"During the game, we are no longer bound and limited by religion, ethnicity, community, and the barriers that have been shackled. We are fluid in helping fellow team members and groups to achieve our group's success. This is an important lesson for us as teenagers living in Manado"*.

Moderate character education carried out through this activity is also implemented through a musical art approach. In this activity they express respect for fellow human beings, respect other people's different religions, love human values, and increase tolerance through singing songs and music.

It turns out that this activity makes it easier for teenagers to interact. The expression stating that art does not look at ethnicity, religion and class actually occurs in this activity. At the end of the activity the youth camp participants were asked to share their experiences of living together and interacting with friends of different religions. The results show that the majority of teenagers and young people who come from different religious backgrounds want togetherness, brotherhood, and tolerance that is maintained and preserved from every generation.

Table 1. Value of Moderation in Activities

Camp	Games/ Character Building
- Openness	- Equality
- Tolerance	- Mutual help
- Accept differences	- Justice
- Understanding each other	- Togetherness
	- Freedom

The emergence of religious moderation values in social activities proves that conflicts and disputes due to differences can be minimized or even eliminated if we prioritize dialogue, communication, openness, tolerance and have the same goals.

Understanding the concept of religion in the context of religious tolerance must also be communicated so that the boundaries set by religion are respected and not violated by the teachings of the religion itself (Surahman et al., 2022). Understanding between religions must be given, communication must be intensified and interaction and joint activities must be carried out more, so that togetherness, brotherhood and tolerance can be realized. This can be shown in Figure 1.

The picture above shows that moderate character through youth social activities can produce good understanding, cooperation, and tolerance between religious communities. Each youth is also given the responsibility to spread the values of religious moderation through their respective social media accounts such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube with the aim of promoting moderation on social media.

Based on the results of research on moderate character education in adolescents through informal activities such as youth camps, there are several things that can be understood that an informal approach to strengthening religious moderation in adolescents needs to be carried out as a new approach through hobbies, interests and the world of adolescents. In addition to the formal approach through education in schools and colleges or seminars and discussion activities, other approaches based on socio-religious experiences must be given to adolescents (Ermayani, 2015).

The habit of living side by side peacefully in differences will give rise to positive perceptions of differences and diversity in life. Likewise, the religious attitudes of the participants shown in the interaction showed a positive tendency towards accepting other different religions, openness and a desire to cooperate.
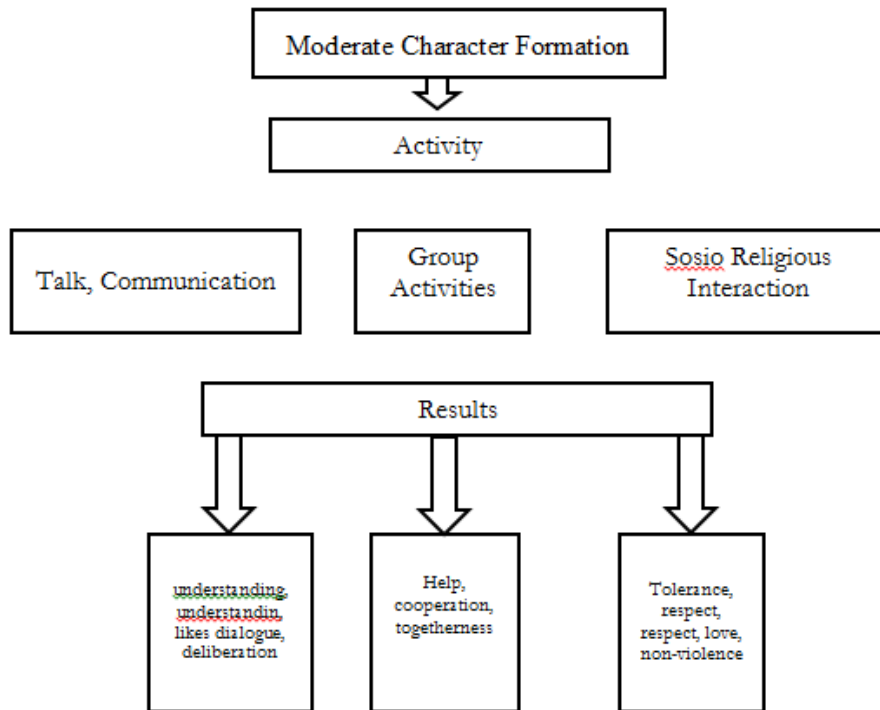
Figure 1. Formation of Moderate Character through social activities.

The urgency of instilling moderate character in adolescents is so that every adolescent who is of productive age can interpret religious differences more wisely, is able to manage information and filter every news that appears, and think about the impact of actions on the wider community. This is so that they can avoid conflict, violence, and intolerant attitudes in religion (Umar et al., 2021).

Therefore, the younger generation needs to be given an understanding of the importance of moderate character. Moderate in a positive sense is a complete religious attitude and respect for the existence of other people, avoiding extremes and not exaggerating. As the meaning of the word moderation (moderâtio-Latin; moderation-English) which means moderation (no excess and no shortage). So that the word moderation means an attitude that is not excessive, or an attitude of taking the middle way (washatiyyah). In Indonesian, this word is then absorbed into moderation, which means reducing violence, or avoiding extremes (Kemenag RI, 2019).

Many misinterpret the attitude of moderation, including those who think that moderation is an attitude that is not completely religious, pawns religious beliefs and teachings and is not sensitive and does not defend their religion. In fact, the word moderate in religion has the meaning of being confident with the religion one embraces, which teaches the principles of fairness and balance. The moderation character of religion necessitates an attitude of openness, acceptance and willingness to work with different groups (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

Having a moderate character in religion allows acceptance of tribes, religions, groups, customs, cultures that are different from ours, so that every citizen does not negate one another just because of these differences.

In the context of religious moderation, tolerance and non-violence are two important indicators that must be instilled in adolescents to reduce the level of fighting, brawls, bullying, vandalism and other negative actions. Especially if it is wrapped in religious issues, it will have a very bad influence and social impact on the life of a multi-religious society.

The people of North Sulawesi, especially the City of Manado, have local wisdom as a force for creating a peaceful life. In addition to the motto, Torang Samua Basudara (we are all brothers) and Torang Samua Creation of God (We are all God's creations), there is also the idea of Sam Ratulangi Si Tou Timou Tumou Tou held by North Sulawesi people, which means that humans are born to humanize other humans, which makes society love and cherish one another. As stated by Sondakh(Sondakh, 2002). Si Tou Timou Tumou Tou has the main value of reflecting love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, kindness, loyalty, gentleness and self-control. This is a cultural value that has high meaning for the life of the people of North Sulawesi (Wuisang, 2016).

In relation to the social and religious life of adolescents, moderate character education based on local values like that in Manado must be one of its own strengths. This should become a kind of social norm, an unwritten rule in a heterogeneous life in terms of religion. Coakley stated that rules, social norms and community cultural values can support the harmonization of people's lives (Coakley, 1986). The differences that exist must foster a spirit of togetherness and acceptance of these differences in heterogeneous life, because differences are a necessity and God's gift to humans (Syaripulloh, 2014).

Teenagers today represent a significant demographic that embodies a wide range of religious beliefs and practices. As globalization continues to influence cultural exchanges, the religious landscape among adolescents has become increasingly diverse. Refers to the coexistence of multiple religions within a society, among teenagers, this diversity is shaped by factors such as family background, cultural influences, and personal experiences. Research indicates that adolescents are often in a phase of exploration regarding their identity, which includes their spiritual beliefs .

First, family influence (Smith, 2021; Sârbu, 2021). Family plays a crucial role in shaping a teenager's religious identity. Studies show that parental beliefs and practices significantly impact their children's religious affiliations and engagement levels. For instance, adolescents from interfaith families may experience a blend of religious traditions, leading to unique spiritual identities. Second, cultural context (Jensen, 2021; Koehler, 2021). The cultural environment in which teenagers are raised also affects their religious perspectives. In multicultural societies, exposure to various religious practices can lead to increased acceptance and understanding of different faiths. Research highlights that teenagers who engage with diverse cultural backgrounds tend to develop more inclusive worldviews. Third, peer influence (Laursen, 2021; Allen et.al, 2022). Peer groups are instrumental during adolescence as individuals seek acceptance and belonging. The influence of friends can lead teenagers to explore new religions or adopt more secular viewpoints, reflecting a shift in traditional beliefs. Communities can benefit from initiatives that encourage interfaith dialogue among youth. Such programs can promote social cohesion and reduce tensions arising from misunderstandings related to religious differences.

Understanding the spiritual needs of diverse adolescents is crucial for mental health professionals. Research suggests that spirituality can play a significant role in coping mechanisms

for stress and identity formation during adolescence. The landscape of religious diversity among teenagers is complex and continually evolving. As adolescents navigate their identities within a multicultural world, understanding their diverse beliefs becomes essential for fostering inclusivity and respect within society. Ongoing research will be vital in addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by this diversity, ensuring that the voices of all young people are heard and valued in discussions about faith and community life.

Every adherent of religion must be given the correct understanding that religious diversity must be interpreted wisely with a comprehensive understanding. Because if diversity is misinterpreted by religious adherents, then what happens is conflict. One of the causes is the claim of truth on the religion itself and considering other religions to be wrong (Elihami, 2014: 217). One-sided claims of religious truth in the public sphere will lead to hyper-multiculturalism, namely a condition in which a person or group thinks that he or his group is the best and most righteous and ignores other parties.

Therefore, strengthening the understanding of religious moderation by paying attention to the existence of other people who have different religions, ethnicities and cultures is very important from the start. Interfaith youth in the city of Manado, as a multi-religious city, are equipped with an attitude of acceptance of the existence of other religions as a form of respect for adherents of different religions. This is very important to equip prospective regional and national leaders who are wise in dealing with pluralism.

Conclusion

The informal approach through interfaith youth camps is a new approach to strengthening religious moderation and as a means to foster a spirit of togetherness between adherents of different religions. Teenagers who have great strength in terms of numbers and extensive mastery of social media must be used as pioneers of religious moderation by first providing moderate character education. The findings of this research have implications and contribute to communication, activities, and social religious interactions as forms of activity that can give rise to an open attitude, cooperation, and respect for others in differences. A new approach to character education, including strengthening moderate attitudes in adolescents, must continue to be carried out by prioritizing the goal of realizing a safe, peaceful, and harmonious life between adherents of different religions in Indonesia. This article is limited to a qualitative approach, so that the future agenda is important to quantitatively explore the non-formal education approach to the moderate character of adolescents so that its level of effectiveness is informed.

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