

CHALLENGING MODERATE MUSLIMS: INDONESIA'S MUSLIM SCHOOLS IN THE MIDST OF RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM

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Abstract: Muslim school is an important element of education in Indonesia. The school has been in place long time before Indonesia's independence in 1945. The school educates Indonesian Muslim children to understand and practice religion, and simultaneously, promotes the sense of nationalism. Thanks to Muslim schools, Indonesian Muslims are recognized as being moderate (Hefner, 2000). In the last few years, however, the moderate nature of Indonesian Islam is challenged by the spirit of conservative Islam (Van Bruinessen, 2013). Issues such as Islam and democracy, Islam and modern state, Muslim and non-Muslim relation, and rights of citizen that have been resolved and agreed upon are being reinstated. As Hefner (2007) argues that there is a relationship between politics and education, especially religious education, it is important to see the relationship between schools and the changing society. The question is how the current conservative trend in Indonesian Islam is occurring at schools. This paper explores how the curriculum of (Islamic) religious education potentially contribute toward the development of Indonesian conservative Islam, and how religious education teachers view sensitive issues concerning conservative Islam. To answer the questions, analysis of religious education's curricula and interviewing experts serve as the primary method of data collection. Four religious education teachers from different provinces of Indonesia were interviewed to reveal their opinions on various religion-related issues. This paper discusses how Islamic education in Indonesia has been designed to present moderate Islam, but at the same time faces a number of challenges that try to turn religious education into a conservative one.

Keywords: Islamic Education; *Pesantren*; Indonesia; *madrasah*; moderate Islam

1. Introduction

Indonesian Islam has been known for its adaptability to modern society. Hefner (2000), for instance, argues that Indonesian Muslims are moving towards a democratic and pluralist Islam. Hefner's argument was based, among others, on the fact that Indonesian Muslims are working towards the creation of a democratic Muslim society. Platzdasch (2009) further observes that the development of Indonesian Muslim society towards a modern Islamic community was based on political movement. However, the development is moving towards the Western understanding about Islam (Platzdasch, 2009). Issues such as human rights, democracy, and gender equality are among emerging issues Muslim scholars face from 1990s to 2000s.

Thanks to the growing number of Muslim schools, Islamic education has been able to promote Islamic teachings within the modern society. My research on the curriculum of Muslim schools proves that there is a reciprocal relationship between Islamic schools and the Muslim society (Zuhdi, 2005). This means that Muslim society demands or facilitates the development of Islamic schools, and, in return, Islamic schools provide education that strengthens the character of Indonesian Muslims.

Hefner (2000) observed that Indonesia has been able to develop a model of democracy compatible with a Muslim majority country. He found that the existence of civil institutions and public civility are among the important factors of the creation a democratic state. Hefner's observation was a reflection of the development of Indonesian social and political situation. In the last period of 1990's, a number of Muslim scholars, such as Abdurrahman Wahid, Nurcholish Madjid, and Dawam Rahardjo, played an important role in shaping the Islamic discourse in the media. Likewise, Muslim organizations, such as *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, were very influential in the grassroots.

In the last few years, Hefner's theory on Indonesian Islam is challenged through the development of conservative Muslims or Islamic populism (Azra, 2017). The issues that have been agreed upon, such as democracy and multi-culturalism, are now being questioned and refuted. The growth of Islamic organizations, such as *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) or Indonesian chapter of Transnational Islamic Party and *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI) or Islamic Defenders Front, for instance, indicate that conservatism plays an important role in Indonesian social development. In 2017, HTI has been officially banned as an organization, yet activists and followers of this organization maintain their ideology to promote *khilafah* (Islamic governance). Hence, the prohibition of HTI does not mean their activists cannot promote their ideology; in many places, the activists continue to promote their ideology to Muslim people, arguing that they are sharing religious teaching with fellow Muslims. In a different way, FPI continues to grow, especially following the 2016 biggest Muslim mass rally that demanded Basuki Cahaya Purnama, the then Jakarta governor, to step down following his speech that was argued as being against Islam. From a social-religious group, helping the needy or victims of disasters, FPI is growing into a lobby group for political agenda. In the last few months, FPI activists promote the changing of the government in the next election. Discussions with political party leaders were held under FPI leadership. They are claiming that they represent the voice of *ummah* (Muslim people). This is what van Bruinessen (2013) calls as "the conservative turn". The release of several controversial *fatwas* (religious opinion) of *Majlis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI) or Indonesia Ulama Council in 2005, according to van Bruinessen (2011), is a bold indication of the conservative turn. Some of the *fatwas* include: *fatwa* on anti-liberalism, secularism, and pluralism, *fatwa* on condemnation of inter-religious marriage, and *fatwa* on Ahmadiyah sect as an apostate of Islam.

The increasing trend of conservative Islam in Indonesia, as described above, leads to several questions, including the role of Islamic education. This research is conducted to explain the positions of Islamic education, especially religious education teachers, concerning issues related to moderate vis a vis conservative Islam in Indonesia. The issues selected are the issues that Muslims have different opinions on. These include Islam and State, Muslim and Non-Muslim relations, Islam and Gender, Non-mainstream Islam, Islam and Media, and Islam and Science.

2. Islamic Education in Indonesia

Religious education, more specifically Islamic education, in Indonesian schools generally has two meanings. The first is religious education or Islamic education as subjects and parts of schools' curriculum. Religious education is a compulsory subject in every Indonesian school. The school has to provide religious education to students of any religions. This is to ensure that every

student has the right to receive religious education. In addition to formal curriculum, a number of non-religion oriented schools also provide other religion-oriented activities at school, such as collective prayers and religious teaching in extra-curricular activities. The second, Islamic education means Islamic educational institution that offers more religious teachings and practices at school compared to non-religious oriented schools. There are three types Islamic education institutions in Indonesia: *Sekolah Islam* (Muslim School), *Madrasah* (Islamic School), and *Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School).

Islamic educational institution has a long story in Indonesia. It is in fact has existed prior to the existence of secular education. Initially, there were two kinds of Islamic educational institution (Muslim school), known as *Pesantren* and *Madrasah*. *Pesantren* is a boarding school that provides religious education for Muslim students. It is the oldest education institution in Indonesia. Lukens-bull (1997) observes that there was no formal education in Indonesia before the 20th century, except *pesantren*. Initially, *Pesantren* only offered religious education. However, due to higher demands for *Pesantren* to also teach non-religion oriented subjects, most *pesantrens* now teach non-religion oriented subjects, such as math, sciences, and languages. Meanwhile, *Madrasah* is a day-school that provides more Islamic teaching in its curriculum compared to non-religious oriented schools. The first *madrasah* in Indonesia was built in 1909 in West Sumatra, known as Madrasah Adabiyah (Yunus, 1996). However, it took long time before *madrasah* was recognized as a formal education institution, even after Indonesian independence in 1945. It started with the 1975 Three-minister Decree on the Improvement of the Quality of Islamic Education (Zuhdi, 2005), then followed by the 1989 National Education System Act, *madrasah* was then officially recognized as formal education. It is important to note that different from *madrasah* in some other parts of the world, like Pakistan, Indonesian *madrasah* provides students with both religious education and non-religion-oriented curriculum, such as sciences, language and citizenship education. In fact, after the 1975 Three-minister Decree, the composition of non-religion-oriented subjects constituted the majority of subjects of the *madrasah* curricula (Zuhdi, 2005). While the majority of *madrasah* belong to private institutions, the curriculum of *madrasah* is regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as opposed to the Ministry of Education that develops curricula for general schools.

In addition to *Pesantren* and *Madrasah*, there is another form of Islamic education institution in Indonesia, known as *Sekolah Islam* (Islamic School). The term refers to day schools that adopt the Ministry of Education curricula, enriched with school's own religious education. Since *Sekolah Islam* creates its own religious education curricula, the Ministry of Religious Affairs does not supervise their religious education.

3. Challenges for Indonesia's Moderate Islam

Despite various definitions of moderate Islam, I tend to agree with Azra's notion on Indonesia's moderate Islam, that is its compatibility with modernity, democracy and plurality (Azra, 2006).¹ One of the main features of Indonesia's Islam is the creation of *Pancasila*.² *Pancasila*

¹ Azyumardi Azra (2006) *Indonesian Islam, Mainstream Muslims and Politics*. Paper presented at Taiwanese and Indonesian Islamic Leaders Exchange Project The Asia Foundation in Taiwan Taipei, October 26-31, 2006.

represents the country's vision on democracy and pluralism. Scholars, such as Azra (2006) and Hefner (2000), argue that democracy as practiced in Indonesia is compatible with the Islamic teachings. This is because Indonesian democracy is slightly different from other countries. Indonesian democracy is not a secular one. It allows some spaces for religions to take important parts and grow.

In the last few years, Indonesian moderate Islam is facing a serious challenge from various groups of Muslims. The challenges are not only coming from those who disagree with the idea of moderate Islam, but also from those who claim themselves as moderates. The notable event of December 2, 2016 in Jakarta shows the challenge of democracy in Indonesia from religious groups. There was a huge mass rally of Muslims in Jakarta, claimed to be the largest Muslim demonstration in Islamic history, demanding the existing Jakarta's governor to be jailed for his [accused] anti-Islam statement. In addition to the abovementioned, some Muslim groups have also demanded the government to accommodate their "Islamic agenda," including sharia-based laws, Muslim leadership in Muslim majority areas, and the banning of anti-mainstream Islamic groups, such as Shi'a and Ahmadiya. Thanks to the growing use of social media, these agenda are well promoted to their Muslim colleagues all over the country. Schools are potential places for the dissemination of various religious and political thoughts, especially in a country where religious education has a special place like Indonesia. This is to say while there are agreeable religious doctrines among the believers, there are a number of issues interpreted differently among them.

Bruinessen (2011) identified three possible causes of the growing trend of religious conservatism in Indonesia: the majority of Indonesian Muslims are actually conservative, the proponents of moderate Islam changed their agenda into politics and hence weakened the promotion of moderate Islam, and the growing influence of the middle eastern countries that promote conservative Islam ideology. In any case, there is concern over the development of conservative ideology in Indonesia, and one of the means of transmitting the ideology is school (Hasan, 2011). As a place for transmission of knowledge, skills and values from generation to generation, school is also a potential place to transfer various ideologies.

There are two important measures to understand the context and the contents of religious education: curriculum and teachers. Despite the fact that education is part of the district autonomous policy, curriculum in Indonesian education is heavily centralized. The government, both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs develop curricula for all levels of schooling. The successful curriculum implementation, however, relies heavily on teachers. There are two different conditions of teachers in terms of their supervisors. Teachers of religious education mostly belong to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (centralized), while teachers of other subjects belong to the district or provincial governments.

4. Islamic Education: Moderate vs Conservative Islam

4.1. *Islamic Education Curricula*

² *Pancasila* or The Five Principles consist of Believe in one God, Humanity, The Unity of Indonesia, Democracy, and Social Justice. These principles were first formulized on June 1, 1945 a few months before the proclamation of Indonesia's independence.

There are two forms of curriculum of Islamic education: *madrasah* curriculum and general school curriculum. Following the 1975 Three-minister Decree on Islamic Education, the government and experts on Islamic education simplify the Islamic education curriculum in *madrasah*. As a result, the contents of Islamic education curriculum in *madrasah* are divided into five subjects: *Quran-Hadith* (the Quran and the Prophet traditions), *Akidah and Akhlak* (Theology and morality), *Fiqh* (Islamic Law), Islamic History, and Arabic language. This division was started in 1976, when the government introduced the first official *madrasah* curriculum. These subjects are compulsory for students from elementary *madrasah* (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) to high school level *madrasah* (*Madrasah 'Aliyah*). The latest regulation on *madrasah* curricula is the Minister of Religious Affairs' Decree No. 165, year 2014 regarding The 2013 Curriculum of Islamic Education Subjects in *Madrasah*.

In regular schools, Islamic education is compressed into one subject, called *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (Islamic Religious Education). Hence, even though there is only one subject in the regular schools, as opposed to five subjects in *madrasah*, there are four sub-divisions of the subject, which is almost similar to the contents of *madrasah* curriculum: *Quran-Hadith* (the Quran and the Prophet traditions), *Akidah and Akhlak* (Theology and morality), *Fiqh* (Islamic Law), and *Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (The History of Islamic Civilization). The Minister of Education Decree No. 21 Year 2016 standardizes the contents of curriculum of all subjects and for all levels of schooling, including Religious Education subject. This standard explicitly mentions four sub-divisions of the content of religious education in general schools (The Minister of Education Regulation No. 21/2016). Another difference between religious education in *madrasah* and general school is the allocated time. The allocated time for religious education in *madrasah* is two hours for each subject or approximately 10 hours per-week (see Minister of Religious Affairs' Decree No. 165/2014). Meanwhile, religious education in general schools is allocated for only three hours per-week. This is certainly not surprising because *madrasah* is a religious-oriented school, and hence it is normal to have more religious education curriculum.

There are two important features that I would like to highlight concerning religious education curriculum in Indonesia: the objective and the content.

4.1.1. The objective

The main objective of religious education in Indonesia is to instill religious beliefs and strengthen religious values and practices among the believers of every religion. This objective is clearly mandated by the National Education Act No. 20 Year 2003 which states that "national education... aims to develop children's potential into human beings that are faithful and obedient to God, with good moral conducts, healthy, knowledgeable, smart, creative, independent, and responsible as well as democratic citizens". As submission to God is a part of the national education objectives, religious education is designed to inculcate faith into children. It should be noted, however, despite the fact that Muslims are majority, Indonesia acknowledges different religions, and religious education should be provided in accordance with students' beliefs.

Indonesia recognizes six different religious beliefs and traditions: Islam, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhism and Confucianism. While Muslims constitute majority of the population, Islam is not the only official religion. The constitution grants equal right for every citizen regardless of their religious beliefs. Despite the fact that Indonesia is a multi-religious

country, religious education is not directed towards understanding of other religious traditions. Religious education in Indonesia is designed to understand students' own religious beliefs and practices, without understanding other religious traditions. This is what Stoeckl (2015) categorizes as confessional religious education approach.

The Minister of Religious Affairs' Decree No. 165 Year 2014 further explains the objective into core competence of religious education in *madrasah*. There are four levels of core competence of religious education: early primary (grade 1-3), upper primary (grade 4-6), secondary (grade 7-9), and high school (grade 10-12). The differences among the grades are as follows:

Table 1
Core Competence (Spiritual Competence) of Islamic Education in *Madrasah*

Grade 1-3	Grade 4-6	Grade 7-9	Grade 10-12
Accepting and exercising religious teachings which he/she embraces.	Accepting, exercising, and appreciating religious teachings which he/she embraces.	Appreciating and living religious teachings which he/she embraces.	Living and practicing religious teachings which he/she embraces.

Similar to *madrasah*, core (spiritual) competencies of curriculum in general (non-religious oriented) schools are also directed towards accepting and practicing students' own religious beliefs. In a slightly different manner, the Minister of Education Decree No. 21 Year 2016 explains the core competence of primary and secondary education as follows:

Table 2
Core competence (Spiritual competence) of Education in General School

Grade 1-6	Grade 7-9	Grade 10-12
Accepting, exercising and appreciating religious teachings which he/she embraces.	Appreciating and living religious teachings which he/she embraces.	Living and practicing religious teachings which he/she embraces.

4.1.2. The content

Both The Minister of Religious Affairs' Decision No. 165 Year 2014 and The Minister of Education's Regulation No. 21 Year 2016 provide comprehensive guidelines on scopes and contents of religious education in *madrasah* and general schools. Generally, there are two main differences between the two. The first is that religious education subject in *madrasah* is categorized into five (5) different subjects, while in general schools only recognize one religious education subject. The second is that time allocated for religious education in *madrasah* is four to five times as much as it is in general schools.

While there are differences in volumes and time-load, the contents of Islamic education in *madrasah* and general schools are closely related. The main difference in terms of content is the Arabic Language, which is not taught in general schools. Generally, the contents of Islamic education in *madrasah* based on the Minister of Religious Affairs' Decree No. 165 Year 2014 are as follows:

1. *Al-Qur'an-Hadith* is a subject that introduces students to basic sources of Islamic teachings and values. The Quran and the *Hadith* lay the foundation on *akidah* (principles of Islamic belief), *akhlak* (principles and practices of Islamic moral conduct), and *syariah* or *fikih* (Islamic law).
2. *Akidah-Akhlak* is a combined subject of basic Islamic beliefs and moral conducts. *Akidah* is about principle of Islamic beliefs. Muslim behaviors that are regulated in *syariah* or *fikih* and *akhlak* are based on *akidah*, meaning that it is the belief that leads Muslim to act in accordance with *syariah* and *akhlak*.
3. *Fikih* is a system or a set of regulation that controls the relationship between human-beings to Allah, to other human-beings, and to other creatures.
4. *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam (SKI)* or Islamic History and Culture is a note on the development of the lives of Muslims from time to time. It shows the way Muslims pray, interact, practice their moral conducts, develop social systems, and spread their religious beliefs and practices throughout the world.
5. *Bahasa Arab* or Arabic Language is an important medium to understand Islamic teachings from its original sources. With language, people can learn Islam directly from the Quran, the hadith, and other reference books that further explore the explanation of Islamic teachings, such as *Tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) and *Syarah Hadith* (Explanation of Hadith).

The five subjects represent the complexity of Islamic teachings. These subjects introduce principles, elaborations and practices of Islamic teachings from basic to advance according to levels of schooling. The religious education curriculum goes on to explain the detail of core and basic competencies of religious education and guides teachers to prepare their lesson plans. The curriculum also provides teachers with detail explanation of each competence. Thus, teachers will be able to perform their duties in transmitting knowledge, values and skills as well as in transforming students' behaviours to reflect the Islamic teachings.

A number of studies found that there are some potential spreads of radical messages through the content of religious education curriculum. Zainiyati (2016), for instance, explores the curriculum of Islamic education through a radicalisation perspective. She found that a number of topics in the existing curriculum potentially lead students to have radical views. Topics such as *khilafah* (Muslim ummah under a single leadership) and *jihad* (the spirit of fighting) are among topics that Zainiyati observed to be potentially misunderstood. If it is understood incorrectly, the topics will lead students to misunderstand the noble meaning of *jihad* which is maximizing efforts in finding good ways to serve Allah through good deeds. *Jihad* could be understood as fighting against those who do not believe in Islam and those who deem as anti-Islam.

Similarly, Hasniati (2017) investigates the use of Islamic education textbooks in high school. She found that all of the observed text books contain ambiguous texts that can be interpreted as either moderate or conservative. The books contain both tolerant as well as intolerant messages. Furthermore, she also found that some radical messages are explicitly stated in the textbooks. For

instance, there was a hadith that says: “those of you who see *munkar* (miss-conduct) should be able to change it with their hands. If hands are not possible, then they should use their mouth. If mouth also cannot work, then at least use your heart, and that is the weakest form of belief”. According to Hasniati (2017), if teachers understand and explain the textual meaning of the hadith without further explanation on the contexts, then students will learn that they have to use their physical strength (hands) to change people’s bad behaviours, as it is better than using mouth or just silently condemning in heart. This will further create chaotic society as people will become police of good conduct to other people, while the standards between groups of people may be different.

4.2. Teachers’ Perceptions

There are five issues that I argue represent the discourses of conservative *vis a vis* moderate Muslims. Different responses to these issues reflect various positions of Muslims. The differences, however, are not clear cut. The positions are somehow spread across continuums, instead of two completely different blocks. The issues selected here are state form, religious differences, position of non-mainstream Islam, media, and gender. As we can see later, religious education teachers share different responses to the selected issues. We certainly cannot make a sudden judgment that the teachers can be categorized into conservative or moderate Muslims. What we can see is how religious education teachers have different opinions about certain issues. Their opinions will somehow influence their students’ understanding of those issues. Woodward (2015) emphasizes that education or school is influential to everyone; what people learn at school will later influence their worldview and decision making. The central for this education process is certainly the teachers. The followings are the responses from four religious education teachers concerning the abovementioned issues.

4.2.1. The issue of state

The Issue of State has existed since the beginning of the country’s history. When the founding fathers of the country discussed the creation of a new independent country, one of the issues discussed emotionally was the form of the new country, whether it would be an Islamic state or a secular one. The solution was the creation of a secular system accommodating the needs of different religious groups. The unifying factor of the debate was the creation of *Pancasila* that serves as the nation’s ideology. *Pancasila* constitutes five principles that reflect the beliefs, culture and imagination of the country. The principles are Believe in One God, Humanity, Unity of Indonesia, Democracy, and Social Justice. With those principles, the country’s elites from different ideological backgrounds, such as nationalism, religious (Islam), and socialism were in agreement to create a country that catered to different ideological interests.

When asked about *Pancasila*, all of the teachers were in agreement that *Pancasila* is the best solution for the country. One, however, regretted that there was a missing clause that may serve better for Muslims. The clause, known as a part of the Jakarta Charter, says, “...with the obligation for Muslims to practice religion in accordance with Islamic Shari’a.” (Al-Hamdi, 2015, 44). Teacher no. 2, who wants to maintain the missing clause in *Pancasila* asserted, “...indeed sad when knowing the history of the deletion of seven words in *Pancasila* which refers to the Islamic Shari’a. If I lived in those days, I must defend the Islamic shari’a in Pancasila.”

The issue of the implementation of Islamic shari’a as a formal law in Indonesia remains existing, regardless all parties’ agreement to Pancasila. In fact, during the so-called conservative turn, the

issue of the implementation of shari'a law begins to rise again. It is not surprising that two out of four teachers agreed to limitedly implement shari'a law in Indonesia, arguing that "I agree to some extent, especially for those who commit drunk, adultery, and corruption. It is necessary to give them deterrent effects..." and the other one said, "It is legitimate if people want to apply Islamic Shari'a in Indonesia. It might not be feasible for all over the country, but it is workable in certain districts..." The other two said, "it is better to increase tolerance instead of implementing shari'a law, we already have *Pancasila* in Indonesia," and "ideally, Indonesia is a non-religion-affiliated country, but inspired by religious values, like what we are having now."

There is another aspiration from some Muslim groups that goes beyond the implementation of Islamic shari'a law, that is changing the country's system from democracy to *khilafah*. *Khilafah*, according to some Muslim leaders, is an ideal form of government that is claimed to be based on the Islamic teaching. *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI) is known as a transnational organization promoting *khilafah* system. While the organization has been banned in Indonesia, a number of HTI activists remain free to spread their ideas of having an Islamic country under the *khilafah* system. When the teachers were asked about *khilafah* system, three of them disagree with the ideology. The remaining one, however, says that it is one's rights to exercise his/her views, including to implement the *khilafah* system, so long as using a lawful way.

4.2.2. Muslim and non-Muslim relationship

The issue of relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is always dynamic. While there is no question that Muslims and believers of other religions can live side by side harmoniously in Indonesia, conflicts among different religious believers continue to exist from time to time. There are various reasons causing the conflicts, such as economy, family, or culture, but religious sentiment can always take its part, especially when the conflict involves people from different religious backgrounds.

Arakaki (2004) observes that, despite the fact that Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, it has no experience in using Islam as a political and social hegemony. It means that the efforts to make Islam as a dominant religion will continue to exist, although not all Muslims are in agreement. Teachers' responses reflect the different positions. Two teachers agree that the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in Indonesia has been positive. Teacher 1 says, "the relationship between Muslims and other religious adherents in Indonesia is very positive compared to other countries. This is because we have *Pancasila*... The fact is that we didn't have a major religious conflict for a long period of time. Even when we have such a problem, it could be immediately responded." The other two participants, on the contrary, found problems in inter-religious relationship. Teacher 3 says, "not good enough. The fact is that there are some cases where different religious believers disrespect each other through social media".

While all Muslims agree on the idea that Muslims should respect believers of other religions, as Islamic teaching says that, they have different opinions on the rights of others, for instance the right in leadership. Some Muslim groups rejected the idea of having a non-Muslim serves as a leader in a Muslim-majority area. The obvious example is the case of general election for the governor of Jakarta in 2017. One of the candidates was a non-Muslim and has been serving as the vice governor and acting governor at the previous period. A number of Muslim conservative groups, such as FPI, did not agree with his candidacy and tried their best efforts to defeat him by supporting his opponents. Various religious issues were exploited to campaign against him, including accusing him with religious blasphemy (Setijadi, 2017). At the end, a Muslim governor was elected and the non-Muslim

candidate was prisoned for the religious blasphemy case. Setijadi (2017) also notes that 33% of voters for the non-Muslim candidate were Muslims, indicating that some groups of Muslims believe that a non-Muslim can also be a leader in a Muslim-majority area.

Another sensitive issue is greetings for religious holidays. While it is acceptable for all Muslims to receive greetings from other believers for observing religious holidays, not all Muslims are in agreement to greet others for their religious holidays, especially Christmas. For them, offering a greeting for Christmas means agreeing with what they believe in, and that is against what they believe as the core of Islamic teaching, i.e. *tawhid* (the onnes of God). In the era of social media, the prohibition of offering Marry Christmas is easily spread across media and confusing ordinary Muslims. In addition to that, the same groups also prohibit Muslim workers to wear symbols of holidays of other religions, such as Santa's hat.

The above cases confirm that there remain a number of crucial issues concerning the relationship between Muslims and believers of other religions in Indonesia. While majority of Muslims agree that they should respect believers of different religions, they are in disagreement on the rights of believers of other religion in public, including leadership rights. This is not to say that inter-religious conflict is a major problem. In fact, different religious believers live harmoniously in Indonesia over decades. *Masjids* (mosques), churches, and temples stand side by side in many places and all different believers can practice their religions freely and securely. However, what have been found confirm that inter-religious social relationship tends to weaken in the last few years due to conservative understandings of religious scriptures.

4.2.3. Non-mainstream Islam

The issue of non-mainstream Islam remains controversial. The existence of some non-mainstream groups, especially those who actively promote their teachings, triggered angers to some Muslim groups, and hence social conflicts cannot be avoided. Some Muslim groups believe that the non-mainstream Islamic groups, such as Shi'a and Ahmadiya should be banned from Indonesia since they violated the principles of Islam, and their existence will be dangerous for other Muslims. An example of this case is the Sunny-Shi'i conflict in East Java in 2007, when a group of anti-shi'a followers attacked a house of a Shi'i cleric in the Island of Madura, East Java (Ida, 2016).

The uneasiness of mainstream Muslims to accept non-mainstream groups is also reflected by the responses of our respondents. Three out of four teachers expressed their disagreement to accept non-mainstream Muslims as part of Muslims. Teacher 1 responded, "they have the same rights as a citizen within the social context. However, we have to follow the *fatwa* (religious opinion) of MUI (Indonesian Ulama Council) on their status in Islam. It means that when MUI says that they are defiant from Islam, we have to correct them...". Teacher 4 went even stronger, "Shi'a and Ahmadiya are not Islam in the theological perspective".

Only one teacher offers a softer response to the question. Teacher 3 says, "Shi'a and Ahmadiya groups have the same rights as other Muslims in Indonesia, so long as their teachings are relevant with Islamic shari'a in Indonesia". He clearly mentions that Shi'is and Ahmadiyas have the same rights with other Muslims, meaning that they are parts of Islam.

A number of studies reported that non-mainstream Islamic groups, such as Shi'a and Ahmadiya, continue to exist despite reluctance from the mainstream Muslim group to accommodate their presence. Zulkifli (2009), for instance, investigates the struggle of Shi'i group to integrate with the wider society and obtain recognition as well as access to public positions. Shi'i in Indonesia,

according to Zulkifli (2009), is a stigmatized group that continues to maintain and extend their existence through education, publication and organization. Unlike Shi'a, Ahmadiya is facing even more difficult situation in Indonesia. Despite its long existence in Indonesia (since 1920s), the doctrines of Ahmadiya cannot be tolerated by the majority of Muslims. A great number of Muslims feel disturbed with their presence as most of their basic beliefs are not acceptable by the mainstream Muslims. The beliefs include the existence of another revelation after the Quran, the existence of another prophet after Muhammad, and condemnation to non-Ahmadi Muslims as deviant (Rofiqoh, 2015). Therefore, a number of Muslim leaders call upon Ahmadiya to claim a new religion instead of claiming as a part of Islam (Avonius, 2008).

These studies confirm that the presence of non-mainstream Muslim groups that have been existed over years in Indonesia remains unacceptable in many places. Their struggle to have equal rights with their fellow Muslims seemed to be very difficult. For many Muslims, it is easier to deal with believers of other religions because the line is clear, and they can respect each other. Dealing with non-mainstream is tricky because they claim to believe in the same religions, yet some major doctrines are different. What makes things worse is often the spirit of missionary that every group has. Some non-mainstream groups often promote their doctrines and try to persuade the mainstream group.

4.2.4. Islam and Media

The representation of Muslims in national and international media is among the discussed issues. Media are important means for spreading ideas, news and building images. For many Muslims, promoting the nature of peaceful Islam is part of their duty as Muslims. Thanks to social media that allow everyone to spread publicly their ideas and opinions, so that devoted Muslims can easily share their religious opinions and activities as ways to promote their religion. However, mainstream media undoubtedly remain important. They serve as references for a lot of people to obtain information.

The issues of radicalism and terrorism, for instance, are most often reported by media as related to a certain Muslim group. Rane and Abdalla (2008) observe that in Western societies like Australia, where Muslims are minority, media tend to present Islam in negative ways, such as violence, terrorism and backwardness. Similarly, Alatas (2005) notes that what Western media represent "... orientalist's stereotypes and misconception of Islam (p. 43)".

Unlike in the Western World, Indonesian Islam has a dynamic relationship with media. While the issues of terrorism and radicalism remain interesting for mainstream media, the media do not easily relate any case of terrorism or radicalism with mainstream Islam. Moreover, considering the vast majority of the audiences are Muslims, the messages of Islamic teaching are part of the important contents of the media. Barkin (2014), for instance, observes that Indonesian private television producers were successful in taking the advantage of Muslim viewers to commercialize Islam. Despite a number of criticisms that they are facing (Barkin, 2014), the media continue to present Islamic messages through television to attract viewers.

Most of respondents agree that Indonesian media present Islam in various positive ways. Teacher 2, confirming Barkin's finding, states that "... it is good, so that *da'wah* (Islamic propagation) does not only occur in *masjids* (mosques)... when Islam exists in media, *da'wah* meets wider audiences". Teacher 3 furthermore asserts that "I so far rely on the national media to confirm

whether or not a piece of information is a hoax. Likewise news about Islam". However, when asked about the representation of Islam in national and international media, two teachers have negative responses. Teacher 1 says that "in my opinion, Islam has not been significantly represented in national and international media. The media focus more on social, economy, politics and security issues. Segment about Islam is insignificant". In a softer way, teacher 3 asserts, "not (well represented) yet. However, it will not be a problem if the national and international media carryout their mission honestly".

4.2.5. Gender issue

The issue of gender is a sensitive case in the Muslim world, including Indonesia, despite the fact that Indonesian society has long time of history in having women participate in public domains, such as market and governance. After the fall of Suharto's regime in 1997, the following election (1999) gave a big opportunity for Megawati Soekarnoputri to run as a president as her party ranked the first on the parliamentary representation. However, Ms. Soekarnoputri failed to claim the presidential seat at that time due to the reluctance of a large group of Muslim parliamentary members. Those who opposed her candidacy for the presidential position argued that woman leadership is a controversial issue in Islam. Hence, for Muslim parliamentary members, it is better to have a male president compared to a female one that may spark controversy and further rejection from the Muslim group (Sadikin, 2008). Megawati Soekarnoputri eventually became Indonesia's first female President in 2001 – 2004, after the failure of Abdurrahman Wahid to maintain his presidential tenure following severe criticism from the Parliament. Ida (2001) reflects the phenomena of the role of Indonesian women in the public sphere. She found that the social construction of women in Indonesia represents the cultures of Javanese patriarchal society as well as majority interpretation to Islamic teaching. The role has been focusing more on the family, both as mother and housewife. However, she further found that in the recent years, the situation is shifting (Ida, 2001), as more women are actively involved in public spheres.

The involvement of women in public spheres receives positive responses from the respondents. All of them are in agreement that Muslim women have the rights to be involved in public spheres. However, they differ in the degree to which the involvement is acceptable. Teacher 2 suggests a very minimum involvement, "welcome if the women are capable (to be involved in public sphere), but the portion may be less (compared to male)... ". Other teachers respond that it is important for women to be involved in public. Teacher 3, for instance says, "... to become human beings that benefit others, so their involvement in public activities makes women useful".

When asked about female leadership, the teachers have different opinions. Two teachers agree, and two others express their disagreement. Teacher 1 and 4 agree that women have the rights to become leader in public sphere as long as they have the capacity. Teacher 2 and 3, on the contrary, believe that women cannot serve as leaders in public, except if there is no more capable man to take the position.

3. Discussion

Indonesia is the most populous Muslim country in the world. As a result of interaction between Islamic teachings and the rich Indonesian culture, Indonesian Islam is somehow different from other Muslim-majority countries, especially in the Middle East. Van Bruinessen, 1999) observes that Indonesian Islam has its own forms of culture that are different from other Muslim

places, but only spread around the archipelago. Azra (2006) identified Indonesian Islam as moderate and not identical with Arab culture. Celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, for instance, is a form of culture in Indonesian Islam. This is an example how local tradition adopts Islam without changing its main mission. The traditions, however, do not influence the Islamic world outside Southeast Asia. The other major characteristic of Indonesian Islam is its adaptability to the pluralistic nature of the country. Indonesian Muslims live harmoniously side by side with believers of other religions. If one visit major cities in Indonesia, it is not unusual to find a *masjid* (mosque) stands nearby a church or a temple; this reflects a symbol of pluralism and tolerance. It is not an exaggeration if Hasyim (2013) proposes Indonesian Islam becomes a model of democracy for other Muslim countries.

In the last few years, the existence of Indonesian Islam meets some challenges from outside, especially the Middle Eastern model of Islam. Several sensitive and critical issues that have been resolved by founding fathers of the country, such as Islam and state, are currently being challenged by the so called neo-conservative Muslims. While the debate between the moderates and the conservatives in Indonesian Islam is not a new phenomenon, the presence of the current debate is very crucial since it relates to the global issues on radicalism and terrorism. In fact, a number of terrorism suspects in Indonesia have some connections with global terrorist groups, such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS (See Gunaratna, 2018). It is obviously difficult to find terrorism suspects before they commit to a terrorism act. However, the spread of their ideology has allowed them expand their messages to their Muslim fellows.

School is a crucial place where the ideology of racism and radicalism could be internalized. Therefore, it is important to know the content of religious (Islamic) education as well as the teachers who deliver the contents. The term radicalism itself is potentially biased as it mostly refers to the Western understanding of radicalism. I argue, however, that radicalism as an idea means the way of thinking that neglects democracy, human rights and plurality. Therefore, issues such as Islam and state, different groups of people, and gender are important to be discussed, as I brought them to teachers.

As this study finds, there are a number of issues that need to be further discussed and followed up with careful attention. The first is the issue of content of Islamic education. It is always problematic on presenting Islamic teachings to a wider Muslim audience. While the sources of Islamic teachings are basically the same, i.e. The Quran and *Hadith* (the Prophet tradition), there are various interpretations to both when it comes to implementation. As a result, a lot of Muslims are not in agreement in various issues. Take the issue of *khilafah* as an example. Some Muslims argue that *khilafah* (Islamic governance) is a non-negotiable concept as mandated by the Prophet, and hence every Muslim should aim to support *khilafah*. Other Muslims argue that governance is a matter of human worldly business. Allah has given human beings the ability think what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, so that they will be able to design a concept for their own personal and collective rights. In fact, the history told that the practice of *khilafah* in the Muslim world did not work very well. Thus, it is up to the best thought of the people of a country to create its own governance, and in the Indonesian case, the Republic of Indonesia is based on *Pancasila*.

The second is the issue of teachers' understanding of the Islamic teaching. This study finds that teachers have different opinions regarding sensitive issues of conservative Islam. Some teachers tend to be closer to conservative; others tend to be more moderate in their understanding about Islam. There is actually no clear demarcation between conservatives and moderate, however, one can generalize that the conservatives tend to be more closed to differences, while the moderates tend to be easier in accepting differences. The attitudes towards the rights of non-believers of Islam and non-mainstream Muslims set a good example to distinguish between the conservatives and the moderates. The challenges are for conservative teachers who tend to protect their students from different beliefs or interpretations. As a result, potential conflicts between different religious believers are higher. Likewise, potential conflicts among different theological schools will also increase.

It is important therefore, to review the contents of the curriculum of Islamic religious education, and find ways that can minimize the conservative thoughts without losing respect to different schools of Islamic teaching. Similarly, it is important to have open and sustainable dialogues between teachers of religious education to share views and understanding of religious education within the context of a pluralistic society. It is also necessary for religious education teachers to have an experience living as a minority with good relationship with majority.

4. Materials and Methods

There are two main sources of this study. The first is curriculum documents of Islamic education in *madrasah*. The curriculum is obtained from the Ministry of Religious Affairs' publication on curriculum of religious education. The second is interview with teachers. Some structured interviews were conducted with four religious education teachers from different institutions: 1 teacher of state *madrasah* in Manokwari (West Papua), 1 Religious Education teacher of State Vocational School (SMKN) in Cianjur-West Jawa, 1 Religious Education teacher in *Pondok Pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School) in Bekasi, Jawa Barat, and 1 Religious Education teacher from a private Islamic school in Jakarta.

There were twenty four questions, clustered into six categories, that I requested the teachers to respond. In order to maintain the objectivity, I mentioned clearly that the questions were only for research purposes and their identities will remain anonymous.

5. Conclusions

Religion plays an important role in Indonesian society, as it is true in a lot of places in the world. The changing social circumstances for various reasons create new challenges to religious values that have been in place for a very long time. Some religious thinkers propose new approach to understand and contextualize religious teaching, while others maintain the perennial doctrines of religion. As a result, we see different responses from various religious groups concerning issues related to religion and social life.

The presence of religious education in school and the existence of religion-oriented school in Indonesia indicate that religion is very important in Indonesian society. The way religion is presented in school further influences how Indonesian people view and practice religion. Therefore, both curriculum and teachers of religious education play some very significant roles in shaping the religious perspective of the Indonesian society.

The fact that there are some potential misunderstanding in religious teaching presented in the curriculum requires the government to review and carefully select the curriculum contents. It is important to ensure that religious values are relevant to the lives of today's people. Therefore, it is equally necessary to facilitate a dialogue between the curricula and the existing social issues. Otherwise, people will see religion as a mere historical heritage.

As religious education teachers play a very important role in shaping religious behaviors, it is very important that the teachers do not only learn religion in a normative way. They also need to situate religion in a very complex structure of today's society. Teachers of religious education need additional tools in understanding religion, in addition to religious knowledge alone. Understanding politics, sociology, history and information technology is very important for religious education teachers. The teachers should be able to present religious teachings as a dynamic set of values that people in today's world need to have.

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