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SOCIOLOGY OF PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: TEACHERS' ROLE AS AGENTS OF SOCIALIZATION FOR RELIGIOUS MODERATION VALUES IN THE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Although religious moderation has become an important agenda in character education, limited research has examined how public elementary school teachers function sociologically as agents of value socialization in rural school contexts. This study aims to examine the role of public elementary school teachers as agents of socialization for religious moderation values in classroom learning. Employing a qualitative approach with a single case study design, the study was conducted at SDN Rejasari, Banjarmangu District, Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java, during the 2025–2026 academic period. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and curriculum document analysis, focusing on the strategies and practices implemented by Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) teachers and classroom teachers. The findings reveal three key dimensions. First, PAI teachers simultaneously perform four roles in instilling religious moderation values: conservator, innovator, transmitter, and transformer. Second, the values socialized include justice (*'adl*), balance (*tawazun*), moderation (*i'tidal*), and unity and brotherhood (*ukhuwah*), which are internalized through exemplary behavior, classroom discussion,

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interfaith activities, and cross-subject integration. Third, the effectiveness of value socialization is strongly supported by teacher–parent collaboration and a conducive school environment, while the main obstacle is the limited direct interaction among students from different religious backgrounds. This study contributes to the development of religious moderation socialization models in rural public elementary school contexts and offers practical implications for strengthening character education curricula.

Keywords: Religious Moderation; Socialization Agents; Public Elementary School; Islamic Education Teachers; Character Education

INTRODUCTION

The rise in radicalism and religious intolerance in Indonesia is a crucial issue that requires systematic handling, especially considering that Indonesia is a country with very high religious, ethnic and cultural diversity, so that the potential for religious conflicts is always a latent threat (Zain, 2023). Data from various survey institutions indicate that the religious harmony index in several regions continues to fluctuate and even declines due to the influence of social media and identity politics (Hanif & Astuti, 2017; Muslih et al., 2023). In this context, formal educational institutions are a strategic arena for instilling the values of tolerance and moderation in a structured manner.

Elementary schools, as the primary socialization institution after the family, play a very strategic role in character formation. Between the ages of 7 and 12, children enter the golden age of developing basic religious and moral values (Muslih et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2025). Therefore, internalizing the values of religious moderation from an early age is urgent to prevent the development of extremist ideology and to build a tolerant, peace-loving generation (Hanif, 2025; Ulum, 2023). Comparative studies between contexts also emphasize this urgency, namely, studies in Kebumen (Adib et al., 2025) show that when religious moderation is not well socialized in a community, the contestation between moderate and conservative groups actually results in a state of serawung kalis (physically together but ideologically separated) that threatens social cohesion. Meanwhile, a study in the Bonokeling community (Rahmah & Hanif, 2026) shows that integrating Islamic values with local wisdom through appropriate socialization agents can foster a religious identity that is moderate, adaptive, and rooted in local culture.

Many previous studies on religious moderation in schools have been conducted. However, most of them still focus on normative aspects, theoretical descriptions, or policy studies. At the same time, the sociological dimension of how teachers act as agents of socialization in the classroom remains very limited. Studies rooted in local culture from Muslih et al. (2023) and Ulum (2023) have successfully identified the various roles of Islamic Religious Education teachers in instilling religious moderation, but have not systematically examined how these roles function in the dynamic socialization process in the classroom. Research by Zain (2023) also shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers have a strong commitment to teaching tolerance and non-violence, but has not yet examined in depth how socialization practices address contextual obstacles. At the higher education level, research by Ni'mah and Hanif (2026) at UIN Saizu Purwokerto demonstrated that the systematic implementation of Inclusive Islamic Studies can transform students' religious orientation from an exclusive-textual to an inclusive-contextual orientation. However, the question of how the foundation for this transformation is built from the elementary school level, particularly in rural elementary schools, remains a significant gap in the literature.

This research addresses this gap by conducting an in-depth field study at Rejasari Elementary School in Banjarmangu District, Banjarnegara Regency. This research has three specific objectives: (1) identifying and analyzing the concrete roles of Islamic Religious Education teachers and class teachers in socializing the values of religious moderation; (2) describing the values of religious moderation that are socialized along with the methods of socialization; and (3) exploring the supporting and inhibiting factors of teacher effectiveness as agents of socialization of religious moderation.

The main argument put forward in this study is that the success of the socialization of religious moderation in rural public elementary schools is largely determined by the capacity of teachers to carry out their dual function as agents of formal socialization (through curricular learning) and agents of informal socialization (through role models, daily interactions, and collaboration with parents), supported by the strength of social capital in the school environment and the students' families. This research is theoretically grounded in the paradigm of educational sociology, specifically the concepts of socialization agents (Ballantine et al., 2021), the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966), and the hidden curriculum (Apple, 2019).

METHODS

The researchers in this study used a qualitative approach with a single case study design. This approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to deeply understand the dynamics of the socialization of religious moderation in the natural context of the classroom and school, not to measure statistical correlations. Single case studies allow researchers to capture the complexity, contextualization, and nuances of socialization practices that are impossible to reveal through survey methods. The study was conducted at SDN Rejasari, Banjarmangu District, Banjarnegara Regency, Central Java, during 2025–2026. The selection of the location was based on the following criteria: (a) having practices that reflect efforts to integrate the values of religious moderation into the curriculum and daily activities; (b) there is a diversity of religious backgrounds among educators; and (c) being willing to participate in the research voluntarily.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, with the following criteria: direct involvement in promoting religious moderation; representing a variety of roles (PAI teacher, class teacher, vice principal, student); and willingness to participate as research informants. The informants in this study included: a PAI teacher (Mrs. NR), a vice principal (Mrs. YT), class teachers with different religious backgrounds (Mrs. TK, the subject of observation), and students in grades 4, 5, and 6 (NB, AD, and NS).

Data collection was conducted through three complementary techniques: (a) Semi-structured in-depth interviews with all informants, using an interview guide developed based on the research objectives; (b) Participant observation in classrooms (PAI learning, thematic science learning, extracurricular religious activities, daily teacher-student interactions); and (c) Document analysis, including curriculum documents, teaching modules, reports of religious activities, and visual documentation. The research lasted for one academic semester to ensure data sufficiency.

Qualitative data analysis using interactive analysis models (Miles et al., 2014) with three stages that take place simultaneously: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data validity is strengthened through four strategies: (a) source triangulation, by comparing data from PAI teachers, vice principals, and students; (b) method triangulation, by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation; (c) member checking, by confirming the interpretation of findings with key informants; and (d) peer debriefing, by discussing findings with fellow researchers.

RESULTS

The Role of Islamic Education Teachers as Socialization Agents

The results of the study at Rejasari Elementary School showed that the Islamic Religious Education teacher (Mrs. NR) played four simultaneous roles as an agent of religious moderation socialization: conservator, innovator, transmitter, and transformer. These four roles do not operate separately; they are intertwined in the teacher's daily practice in the classroom and the school environment. In her role as a conservator, Mrs. NR consistently rejects any negative comments about other religions and teaches children to be kind to everyone regardless of their religious background. When asked about the essence of religious moderation in the context of the elementary school, Mrs. NR stated: "Religious moderation is very important, because in essence, religious moderation is adhering to one's own religious teachings while still respecting others who are different, used as a foundation."

In her role as an innovator, Mrs. NR developed various learning methods, including role-playing with scenarios featuring figures from different religions, a project to create a wall magazine about religious holidays in Indonesia, and a simulation of visits to interfaith places of worship. Religious moderation is also linked to local culture, such as gamelan art, batik, and local traditions. The presence of Mrs. TK, a teacher with a different religious background, at SDN Rejasari serves as the most organic socialization medium. The harmonious relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim teachers, seen daily by students, serves as a hidden curriculum that strengthens the internalization of the value of tolerance. It was confirmed by the Vice Principal (Mrs. YT), who stated that the value of religious moderation is integrated into various subjects such as Pancasila Education on mutual respect and appreciation, and Indonesian through stories about diversity.

From an institutional policy perspective, the socialization of religious moderation at Rejasari Elementary School is carried out through coordination between school policy and individual teacher practices. Ms. NR acknowledged the role of training in shaping her approach: "In the training, it was explained that religious moderation is like this, we have to teach children like this, there is guidance, materials, and learning provided." All teachers at Rejasari Elementary School also regularly gather in internal school forums, where values that must be reinforced as educators, including respect and appreciation for diversity, are continuously instilled.

Socialized Values of Religious Moderation and Its Methods

PAI teachers at Rejasari Elementary School integrate the four core values of religious moderation into every aspect of classroom interactions. The value of justice is practiced by organizing mixed-gender study groups without discrimination based on gender, religion, or academic ability. The value of tawazun is taught through the understanding that students can love their own religion while respecting the beliefs of others, a position theologically and sociologically referred to as active tolerance. The value of i'tidal is realized by not forcing certain religious rituals on students, as confirmed by Nabila (grade 4): "No, not forcing my will." The value of *ukhuwah* is practiced through various community activities, including routine teacher collaboration every Friday, which students witness and internalize.

The socialization methods used demonstrated a distinct hierarchy of effectiveness. First, the teacher role model method proved most effective because students directly imitated the teacher's behavior. AD (grade 5) explicitly stated: "Mrs. TK is here, we must respect each other even though we are in the same school environment." This statement indicates that harmonious interactions between teachers of different religions have been successfully internalized as a social norm. Second, the storytelling and discussion method proved effective in conveying the value of tolerance, although student retention rates for the story content varied. Third, the habituation method through routine activities was effective across all grade levels. Fourth, collaborative projects, such as creating a wall magazine about religious holidays, demonstrated high effectiveness because they involved active student participation.

The responses of Rejasari Elementary School students to religious situations reflect a consistent internalization of values. When asked how they would react if a friend of a different religion wished them "Happy Eid al-Fitr," the three students interviewed (NB, NS, AD) uniformly expressed gratitude. This finding indicates that the socialization of t*awazun* and *ukhuwah* values has permeated students' attitudes and behavioral responses. Ms. NR also integrated the value of tolerance into non-Islamic religious education subjects using a contextualization approach: "There are people of different religions, different skin colors, every child has a different nature, we must respect each other and face differences." Parental involvement in the socialization process is also carried out through plenary meetings, where teachers provide guidance and support so that parents can serve as role models of moderation at home and supervise their children.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

This study identified six key supporting factors that facilitate teachers at Rejasari Elementary School as effective agents of religious moderation. First, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have strong pedagogical competence and flexibility in using a variety of learning methods. Second, a conducive school environment. Mrs. YT stated that there have been no serious problems related to religious moderation and that parents are supportive. Third, active parental involvement through plenary meetings and regular communication. Fourth, the presence of an interfaith teacher (Bu TK) who organically creates a model of tolerance that students can directly observe every day. Fifth, the Islamic Religious Education (Kurikulum Merdeka) textbook, which, according to Mrs. NR, already supports the teaching of religious moderation. Sixth, the KKGPAI activities that teachers regularly participate in reinforce the values of moderation through the sharing of good practices among teachers.

On the other hand, there are four significant obstacles. The first and most fundamental obstacle is the limited direct experience of students interacting with friends of different faiths, given the homogeneity of students' religious backgrounds. Ms. NR admitted: "During my time here, there has never been any conflict between students of different faiths, because the majority of students here are Muslim." This condition makes the internalization of the value of moderation more cognitive and declarative, rather than fully experiential or evident in the confessions of Nabila and Andre, who understand the concept of interfaith tolerance but do not have friends of different faiths at school. The second obstacle is the limited formal collaboration with other religious institutions, although there is an informal partnership through TPQ. Ms. YT admitted: "Maybe in the future it can work in parallel." The third obstacle is the lack of a specific training program on religious moderation for elementary school teachers, as the available training remains general within the KKG framework. The fourth obstacle is the potential counterproductive influence of the digital environment and social media. However, Ms. YT stated that the influence of mass organizations around the school is still conducive.

DISCUSSION

The Meaning of the Role of PAI Teachers as Agents of Socialization

The finding that PAI teachers at SDN Rejasari simultaneously play dual roles as conservators, innovators, transmitters, and transformers confirms that the process of socializing religious moderation does not occur mechanically, but rather through complex symbolic interactions. Teachers not only convey verbal messages in class but also create a social environment conducive to the internalization of values through concrete actions, as conceptualized in social learning theory (Bandura, 1971) and the hidden curriculum (Apple, 2019).

In particular, the presence of Mrs. TK as an interfaith teacher who is treated equally demonstrates that the school environment itself serves as a hidden curriculum (Apple, 2021; Goffman, 1956), thereby strengthening the socialization of moderation. This pattern is identical to that found in the Bonokeling community, where kiai and traditional leaders act as complementary socialization agents who foster inclusive awareness through everyday social practices rather than just formal instructions (Rahmah & Hanif, 2026). At SDN Rejasari, a similar function is carried out through harmonious relations among teachers of different religions, which serve as a direct model for students.

These findings also complement the picture presented by Ni'mah and Hanif (2026) at the higher education level. While at UIN Saizu, the transformation from exclusive to inclusive occurred through the Religious Moderation, FMB, and MBKM courses. At SDN Rejasari, the foundation of an inclusive disposition is being built through teacher role models, habituation, and collaborative projects from an early age. This cross-level continuity is important because it confirms, as in the study by Adib et al. (2025), that communities that lack strong socialization tend to end up in a "serawung kalis" condition, a condition that should be prevented in elementary school.

The Meaning of Socialized Religious Moderation Values

The fact that the values of religious moderation promoted at SDN Rejasari include justice, balance, simplicity, and brotherhood indicates that religious moderation is not merely a passive attitude of tolerance, but rather a set of active actions that must be practiced and cultivated from an early age. The responses of the students interviewed reflect a consistent internalization of these values: NB, NS, and AD uniformly demonstrated an attitude of *tawazun* (balance) by stating that they would be grateful for Eid greetings from friends of

different faiths but would not participate in other religious practices, "not participating, because we each have our own religion," as conveyed by NS. These values align with the principle of *wasathiyyah* (middle way) in Islam and are universal with human values.

These values align with the four indicators of religious moderation identified by Adib et al. (2025). These values include national commitment, anti-violence, tolerance, and acceptance of local traditions. At SDN Rejasari, these four indicators are instilled from an early age through the curriculum and teacher role models. Interestingly, the religiously homogeneous rural context actually encourages teachers to be more creative in presenting the reality of diversity, a finding that extends and strengthens research by Zain (2023) and Muslih et al. (2023). An interesting parallel is also seen with the findings from Rahmah and Hanif (2026) about the Bonokeling community: the success of the transmission of the values of *tawadu'*, *ukhuwah*, and *ta'awun* in the community is based on institutionalized social practices, not just verbal doctrines, but patterns that are the same as those found at SDN Rejasari.

The Meaning of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Findings regarding supporting and inhibiting factors at SDN Rejasari indicate that the success of promoting religious moderation depends not only on teacher quality but also on the school environment and the availability of direct experiences with diversity. The biggest obstacle is the lack of direct interaction between students of different religions due to religious homogeneity, a unique contextual challenge for elementary schools in rural areas. This condition actually clarifies why the findings from Adib et al. (2025) are highly relevant for comparison: ideological differences between moderate and conservative groups in the community exploded when there was no sufficiently strong early socialization mechanism. It reinforces the argument that investing in moderate socialization at the elementary school level, even in a homogeneous environment, is a strategic, long-term preventive measure. Meanwhile, the dual authority model (*kiai* and traditional leaders) that proved effective in the Bonokeling community inspired the development of a formal partnership model between elementary schools, TPQ, and local religious institutions as an integrated ecological system of moderate education, an opportunity identified in this study but not yet realized (Rahmah and Hanif, 2026).

In particular, the findings at SDN Rejasari confirm that parental support channeled through plenary meetings can be a complementary factor that complements teachers'

socialization efforts (Yusuf et al., 2025). At the same time, the opportunity for informal partnerships with existing TPQs should be formalized into a synergy model, namely one that has not been studied in the literature and constitutes an original contribution of this research.

CONCLUSION

This study identified three main findings regarding the socialization of religious moderation by Islamic Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*/PAI) teachers at Rejasari Elementary School, a rural school. First, PAI teachers play a dual role as conservators, innovators, transmitters, and transformers of religious moderation. Their role models in harmonious interfaith interactions at school have proven to be the most effective socialization medium, surpassing formal verbal instruction. Second, the values of moderation (*'adl*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, and *ukhuwah*) are successfully internalized by students at the cognitive and declarative levels, primarily through role modeling and habituation; however, the experiential dimension is limited due to the students' religious homogeneity. Third, the effectiveness of socialization is determined by the educational ecology, which involves teachers' pedagogical capacity, parental support, and a conducive school environment, with the main obstacle being limited interaction between students of different religions—a contextual challenge typical of homogeneous areas.

Theoretically, this study enriches the model of socialization into religious moderation in rural elementary schools by integrating educational sociology, social learning theory, and the concept of the hidden curriculum. Practically, the implications include: (a) specific teacher training for rural contexts; (b) an experiential learning-based curriculum; and (c) a formal partnership model between schools, families, and community religious institutions. This study has three limitations: (a) its focus on a single school, limiting generalizability; (b) the students' religious homogeneity, which hinders analysis of the dynamics of interreligious interactions; and (c) its short duration, which does not capture long-term attitudinal changes. Suggestions for further research include: (a) a comparative study of rural-urban elementary schools with diverse religious compositions; (b) a longitudinal study of the internalization of moderation from lower to higher grades; (c) an evaluation of an experiential learning program; and (d) the development of an elementary school-TPQ-religious institution partnership model as an integrated educational ecosystem.

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