

Religious Character Education as a Strategy for Forming Religious Moderation in Students

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the implementation of religious character education in shaping students' religious moderation at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through observation and interviews with the principal, teachers, homeroom teachers, and students from grades X to XII. Religious character education is implemented through various activities such as the celebration of the beginning of the month service, prayer and reflection on the Holy Scriptures before and after learning, as well as student involvement in service activities in the church. In addition, during special months such as the celebration of ecclesiastical holidays such as Easter and Christmas. The results of the study show that these activities have a positive impact on student behavior, such as increasing tolerance, discipline, respect, solidarity, and concern for the environment. Religious character education has been proven to be an effective strategy in instilling the values of religious moderation among students, especially in forming an attitude of mutual respect and living peacefully in diversity.

Keywords

Religious character education, Religious moderation, Students



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BACKGROUND

Character is a fundamental part of shaping one's personality. Character not only reflects morals and ethics but also serves as the foundation for behavior as an individual and a member of society. Character education has become a crucial issue in Indonesian education, particularly amidst rampant moral degradation such as deviant behavior, intolerance, student violence, and a loss of student responsibility and discipline. According to Thomas Lickona (1991), "character education is the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue—objectively good human qualities that are good for the individual and good for the whole society." This means that character education aims to shape virtue in students as a preparation for life in society. One very essential type of character education is religious character education, namely

education that instills the values of faith and piety in everyday concrete actions. This religious character education not only instills a spiritual connection between humans and God but also teaches ethical attitudes towards other humans and the natural environment. Yahya Khan (in Asmani, 2011:64) divides character education into four main types: religious, cultural, environmental, and self-potential-based character education. Of these, religious values-based education is considered the primary foundation because it refers to divine teachings and revelations that are absolutely believed in by religious adherents. Religious character education has the power to shape individuals who are moral, tolerant, and uphold universal values.

Effective religious education can be a crucial strategy in fostering religious moderation. Religious moderation is a balanced, just, and non-extremist religious attitude. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2019), religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and practice of religion in communal life by embodying the essence of religious teachings that protect human dignity and promote the common good. This attitude is crucial to instill in students, so they can become a tolerant generation capable of coexisting in a pluralistic society. According to Al-Makin (2020), "religious moderation does not mean mixing religious teachings, but rather understanding religion inclusively and avoiding narrow interpretations that can trigger conflict." Therefore, fostering religious moderation must begin in education, particularly through strengthening religious character education that teaches compassion, tolerance, empathy, and justice.

As a formal educational institution, SMK Negeri 3 Alasa plays a strategic role in fostering students' religious character as a means of preparing them to face the challenges of the multicultural era. Based on initial observations, the school has students from diverse religious and social backgrounds, so religious character development is also directed at strengthening a spirit of togetherness, harmony, and tolerance. Activities such as practicing prayer before and after class, participating in religious celebrations, and regular spiritual guidance serve as strategic tools for internalizing inclusive religious values.

Religious character education at SMK N 3 Alasa is expected to shape students into individuals who are religiously devout as well as open and respectful of differences. The religious character that is instilled not only makes students ritually pious individuals, but also has social awareness to live harmoniously in a pluralistic society. This is in line with the vision of national education as stated in Law Number 20 of 2003 Article 3, that the goal of national education is to "develop the potential of students to become human beings who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble

character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become democratic and responsible citizens." Based on this background, it is important to examine more deeply how religious character education can be used as a strategy in shaping religious moderation in students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. This approach was chosen because it could provide an in-depth description of how religious character education is implemented as a strategy for fostering religious moderation at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa. The research process was conducted naturally and oriented toward the meaning of the phenomenon under study. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were used to directly observe religious activities at the school, interviews were conducted with teachers, the principal, and students, while documentation was used to collect written and visual data related to the school's religious programs. All data were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively through the processes of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa, findings were obtained that religious character education has been integrated into various aspects of school activities, both formal and informal. Activities such as praying together before and after learning, carrying out religious services according to each religion, routine spiritual guidance, and celebrating religious holidays are part of the habits instilled in students. These practices indicate that the school actively instills religious values, such as honesty, responsibility, tolerance, and discipline. The discussion of the data obtained at the research location regarding the Implementation of Religious Character Education as a Strategy for Forming Student Religious Moderation at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa, is based on the results of interviews with the Principal of SMK Negeri 3 Alasa, the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, the Christian Religious Education Teacher as well as several homeroom teachers and students from grades X to XII. The following are the results of interviews with several sources, how to implement religious character education on behavior at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa According to Mrs. KH, before teaching and learning activities, students first line up in the field for morning assembly, then listen to readings and reflections delivered by religious teachers, which are in accordance with the readings on that day. Then in the content of the reflection there is a meaningful message, which is related to the behavior of students in the school

environment. For example, about discipline, cleanliness and manners as a student. In addition, students of SMK Negeri 3 Alasa are active in church services in the end-of-month worship activities at the BNKP Hiligawoni church, students are involved in choir activities, collections, singers, musicians, and liturgy. This end-of-month activity has been scheduled to be held once a month. The implementation of religious character education on the character of students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa according to Mrs. MN, before and after teaching and learning activities, students are directed by the teacher to begin and end the lesson with prayer. This is a form of asking God to be given health, accompany, guide in learning, what is conveyed by the teacher who teaches the subject can be understood and comprehended. Then also thank God for all His presence that has been given throughout the day at school. The implementation of religious character education on the behavior of students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa according to Mrs. LM, on major church holidays students are involved in services and activities of major church holidays, such as Easter and Christmas celebrations. According to Mr. RZ, Christian students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa are required to bring a Bible when carrying out Christian Religion learning hours, this rule is required to train student discipline in knowing and understanding the contents of the Bible, This is also one of the implementations of the character of religious education.

According to Mrs. Kh, the factors that support the implementation of religious character education on student behavior are caused by various factors. that the educational institution's commitment to building a religious school culture is the main foundation. The school actively integrates religious values into daily activities such as praying together before and after lessons, conducting routine religious services according to each person's religion, and cultivating greetings and polite behavior in interactions among members of the school community. Furthermore, the school's vision and mission, which align with strengthening the values of faith and religious moderation, strengthen the direction of character development policies and programs. Meanwhile, Mr. FH explained that the active involvement of teachers in providing role models and spiritual guidance is a very influential supporting element. Teachers not only teach religious material textually but also demonstrate attitudes of tolerance, social awareness, and openness to diversity within the school environment. He also added that collaboration between teachers of various faiths in developing religious activities and character development helps students better understand the universal values founded in each religion, such as compassion, honesty, and mutual respect. The following supporting factors were conveyed by DKG students: support from parents and the community environment also strengthens the religious character education received at school. According to him, what is taught at school is in line with the values applied at home, such as the habit

of praying, mutual respect for different beliefs, and upholding ethics in social interactions. The students also feel that the religious activities carried out by the school encourage them to be more open, not fanatical, and able to live side by side peacefully with friends of different religions and cultural backgrounds. Overall, the interview results indicate that the successful implementation of religious character education at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa is greatly influenced by the synergy between school leadership, teacher role models, and support from family and the community. This combination of factors makes religious character education an effective strategy in shaping students who are not only religiously devout, but also have a moderate, tolerant attitude and noble personality..

Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors in implementation were conveyed by Mrs. MH. The implementation of religious character education faces a number of complex and interrelated challenges. Ms. MH explained that one of the main obstacles is the weak synergy between schools and parents in supporting student character development. Many parents hand over the full responsibility for religious education to schools without providing role models or reinforcing spiritual values at home. As a result, there is a value imbalance that leaves students confused about consistently implementing religious attitudes. Furthermore, there is a lack of supporting facilities, such as appropriate prayer rooms and adequate religious facilities, to support students' spiritual activities at school. Ms. KH also stated that another challenge arises from an overly dense curriculum structure that places greater emphasis on cognitive aspects and academic achievement, leaving very little room for reinforcing religious values in daily practice. A source of information from student YZ stated that many students participate in religious activities simply out of obligation, rather than awareness.

The lack of a heartfelt approach and a monotonous delivery style make most students less interested and even consider religious character education boring. Overall, the results of this interview indicate several factors inhibiting the implementation of religious character education at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa, not only originating from external factors such as family support, but also from within the school itself, namely weaknesses in character education management, lack of training for teachers, and the lack of approaches that touch on the affective aspects of students. Therefore, a comprehensive evaluation of the strategy for implementing religious character education is needed so that it is not only formal, but truly touches and shapes personality in depth.

The impact of the implementation of religious character education on student behavior at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa according to Mrs. LM as the homeroom teacher for class 10 This means that 10th-grade students entering vocational high school

generally experience a significant transition from junior high school to vocational high school. Through religious habituation activities such as communal prayer, religious guidance, and the implementation of ethical interactions within the school environment, 10th-grade students begin to show changes in discipline, a sense of responsibility, and respect for teachers and fellow students. Furthermore, their adaptation process is made easier because the religious values taught foster a sense of togetherness and social awareness among students. Meanwhile, Mr. RZ, the 11th-grade homeroom teacher, revealed that the 11th-grade students have completed a year of character development and are beginning to show spiritual and moral maturity. They not only participate in religious activities as a routine but also begin to implement religious values into their daily behavior. Students are seen to be more tolerant of differences in religion, culture, and personal views. In class discussions and student council activities, 11th-grade students are able to demonstrate an open attitude, respect others' opinions, and avoid conflicts related to ethnicity, religion, and race.

According to the homeroom teacher, this is the result of the consistent application of religious attitudes in the curriculum and school culture. The 12th-grade homeroom teacher, Mr. FH, highlighted the impact of religious character education in preparing students to face challenges outside of school, especially when they complete their studies and enter the workforce or continue on to higher education. Twelfth-grade students generally have a deeper understanding of the importance of morals and religious values as a basis for making decisions, addressing differences, and maintaining personal integrity. Some students are even active in religious activities outside of school, and the two years of education have had a significant impact on shaping students who are not only academically intelligent, but also wise in their actions, polite in their interactions, and able to become ambassadors of religious moderation in a pluralistic society. In general, the results of interviews with the three homeroom teachers indicate that the implementation of religious character education has a gradual and sustainable impact according to the level of student development. Religious character education not only fosters individual obedience but also strengthens the values of tolerance, social responsibility, and maturity of thinking in students at every level of education. This also serves as proof that the strategy of forming religious moderation through religious character education can be effective and make a significant contribution to the formation of student personality at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa.

In the classroom action research conducted by the researcher, in the Christian Religious Education lesson, the author as the subject teacher of Christian Religious Education implemented religious character education on the character of students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa through the Christian Religion lesson material with the theme "Developing an Attitude of Tolerance and Cooperation". The author explained to Sis asfollowing:

1. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher first explains the meaning of tolerance and cooperation as the basis of the religious character that is to be built. Tolerance is understood as an attitude of respecting and accepting differences, whether in beliefs, views on life, or cultural backgrounds. This important attitude is so that students are able to live side by side peacefully in a pluralistic society while cooperation is the ability and willingness to work together with others in achieving common goals, with mutual respect and complementarity. From a Christian perspective, these two values have a strong biblical basis, in Romans 12:18 which emphasizes the importance of living in peace with everyone, and Philippians 2:2-4 which encourages humility and prioritizing the interests of others.
2. Through this theme, students are encouraged to recognize the core values fostered by tolerance and cooperation. The first value is respect for differences, fostering the understanding that every individual is unique and that differences are not grounds for hatred. The second value is equality, which teaches that no group is superior to another. This is crucial to avoid discriminatory or bigotry. The third value is empathy and solidarity, the ability to understand others' feelings and care for others regardless of their background.
3. After understanding these values, students are encouraged to apply tolerance and cooperation in their daily lives, particularly within the school environment. Concrete attitudes that need to be cultivated include being open to others' opinions, refraining from criticizing or vilifying friends with differing beliefs, and respecting classmates' prayer times and religious activities. In the context of group work, students are encouraged to actively participate, share tasks fairly, and respect the opinions and contributions of each group member. Implementing these attitudes is crucial to ensuring that the learning process is not only academic but also fosters humanitarian and religious values in social practice.
4. To clarify the material, teachers provide concrete examples of tolerance and cooperation both at school and in everyday life. At school, students can practice tolerance by not discriminating against friends when socializing or working together in study groups, regardless of their religion or background. Helping friends who are having difficulty understanding a lesson or facing problems is also a form of solidarity that reflects religious character. In the family and community environment, students can demonstrate tolerance by respecting family members who have different views and actively participating in social activities such as community service, fundraising, or

serving in churches and the community. These examples help students see that the values of tolerance and cooperation can be lived out in various life contexts.

5. In the final section of the material, students are encouraged to recognize that tolerance and cooperation are not always easy to implement due to challenges. Some of the challenges often faced include negative prejudice against other groups, stereotypes instilled since childhood, and environmental influences or social media that provoke division. To overcome these, students are taught the importance of dialogue with empathy, openness to differences, and prioritizing love as a primary principle in social interactions. The teacher also emphasizes that in the Christian faith, love for others regardless of differences is a tangible form of obedience to God. Therefore, building tolerance and cooperation is not merely a social obligation, but also a form of faithfulness to faith.

Through Christian Religious Education learning with the theme "Developing an Attitude of Tolerance and Cooperation," students at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa gain a deeper understanding of the importance of living with mutual respect amidst differences. This learning not only provides cognitive knowledge, but also fosters students' spiritual and social awareness of the values of love, empathy, justice, and unity. Students demonstrate positive development in being open, non-discriminatory, and able to cooperate actively and fairly in everyday life, both at school and in broader social relations. This material also helps students realize that Christian faith does not stop at formal worship, but is also manifested in concrete actions that reflect God's love for all people without discrimination. Through a religious character approach, students are not only guided to be spiritually obedient, but also to become inclusive individuals, respect diversity, and uphold peace. Religious character education has proven to be an effective strategy in shaping students who are not extreme in their thinking, are able to dialogue with differences, and bring religious values into the context of living together. Thus, this lesson strengthens the position of religious education as a means of building religious moderation from an early age in the world of formal education, especially in the environment of SMK Negeri 3 Alasa.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the implementation of religious character education at SMK Negeri 3 Alasa is an effective strategy in forming an attitude of religious moderation in

students. Through various approaches, both through formal religious activities and the integration of religious values in subjects, such as Christian Religious Education with the theme "Developing Attitudes of Tolerance and Cooperation", students show an increase in attitudes of tolerance, empathy, and the ability to work together across differences. Support from various parties, such as teachers, homeroom teachers, and the school, also strengthens the implementation of religious values in students' daily lives. The impact is seen in changes in student behavior from grades X to XII, which increasingly reflect a moderate and inclusive religious character. Religious character education not only shapes the spiritual side, but also builds a high social awareness amidst diversity. Thus, religious character education is worthy of being the main strategy in fostering a young generation who is not only academically intelligent, but also wise in religious and social life. The implementation of these values is in line with the goals of national education and is relevant to creating a peaceful and harmonious national life.

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