

Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy and contextualization of Islamic moderation: Challenges to religious extremism

Nafik Muthohirin* & S. Suherman

Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Indonesia

ABSTRACT: Part of the Muslim community in Indonesia understands the Muhammadiyah's movement of purification paradoxically. They regard this ideology as a foundation of thought that is anti-reform. This puritanical style of Islam is seen as the cause of a number of Muhammadiyah members being exposed to the ideology of terrorism in the last two decades. This study explains that this assessment is very baseless, because it ignores the characteristics of Muhammadiyah as a reform movement (*tajdid*). This article examines the basis of Muhammadiyah's Islamic moderation through the educational principles taught by *Kiai* Ahmad Dahlan contained in his speech and official Muhammadiyah documents. In detail, this paper focuses on two important research objects, namely studying the Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy and contextualizing the principles of Islamic moderation, as well as making it a foundation for resilience from the ideology of religious-based violent extremism. Thus, this article concludes that even though Muhammadiyah adheres to purification of Islam, Muhammadiyah has strengthened its movement ideology and religious thought through the renewal of the Islamic education movement which promotes rational, modern and scientific thinking.

Keywords: Islamic Education, Muhammadiyah, Religious Extremism, Islamic Moderation

1 INTRODUCTION

Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy contains the teachings of Islamic moderation which are epistemologically based on three important documents, namely: First, the speech of *Kiai* Haji Ahmad Dahlan entitled "The Unity of Human Life" which was published by the Taman Pustaka Assembly of Muhammadiyah with the title "Tali Binding Life (1923)"; Second, Praeadvis HB Muhammadiyah at the Cirebon Great Islamic Congress (1921); Third, the Decree of the 46th Muktamar Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta (2010) concerning the Revitalization of Muhammadiyah Education (Mul Khan and Abrar 2019).

These three documents contain Muhammadiyah teachings that encourage its citizens to be inclusive, prioritize rationality and knowledge, master technology, and care about education and the economy of the poor. These three documents became the basis for the development of educational philosophy and the foundation for Muhammadiyah's religious moderation from the threat of religious radicalism.

Islamic education (*tarbiyyah*) has been one of Muhammadiyah's areas of work since its establishment in 1912. As an Islamic organization committed to the mission of enlightenment, Muhammadiyah's philosophy of Islamic education is based on Islamic teachings by focusing on moral development, developing one's intellectual, spiritual, and social attitudes. Islamic education is considered as a means to develop individual potential so that they can become individuals who are able to contribute positively to society. Therefore, the aim of Muhammadiyah education is to make someone a perfect human being, namely someone

*Corresponding Author: nafikmuthohirin@umm.ac.id

who achieves perfection in all aspects of life. Education is expected to foster religious, scientific, personality and good skills, so that a person can live a prosperous and happy life in this world and the hereafter. In practice, Muhammadiyah Islamic education emphasizes the development of *aqidah*, morals, knowledge, skills and entrepreneurial spirit. Education is also expected to foster an attitude of tolerance, cooperation, creativity, criticality and independence as well as providing a correct understanding of Islam.

The concept of Islamic education which prioritizes knowledge, rationality and openness becomes the three philosophical foundations for Muhammadiyah. It explains to the public that the Islamic organization which is more than a century old contains moderate Islamic values. In one of Kiai Dahlan's speeches it was stated that Muhammadiyah education should be encouraged to produce progressive *kiai* (Arifin 1985; Rosyidi 1975). Kiai Dahlan's statement through a number of texts of his speech is contradictory to the emergence of various intolerant groups who are anti-science and are closed to new views. This also confirms that Muhammadiyah has no relationship at all with religious fundamentalist groups, either those who aspire to establish an Islamic state through political Islam or those who act by means of violence and terrorism (Muthohirin 2014; Tibi 1998).

2 METHODS

This research was deliberately made to complement the studies on Muhammadiyah educational philosophy which are still very few. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the progress of Muhammadiyah in the field of Islamic education. On the other hand, the author sees that there is a positive potential that through the philosophy of Islamic education which originates from these various documents, Muhammadiyah can elaborate it into a basis for religious moderation from the threat of extremist movements and ideologies.

The design of this study uses a form of qualitative research. Various data sourced from the statements or speeches of *Kiai* Dahlan and a number of important Muhammadiyah documents were analyzed and elaborated by the author to become conceptual formulations capable of contributing as counter-narratives to various dissemination of ideas of religious extremism which is a challenge for Muslims.

According to Bungin, qualitative research aims to understand the social phenomena being studied by utilizing one important keyword, namely how a researcher understands an object of research, so that its nature is in process (Bungin 2003). In relation to this research, a qualitative approach is useful for exploring and understanding the literature that contains the formulation of Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy. In addition, this qualitative research is used to understand a number of empirical facts regarding the occurrence of various acts of religious extremism.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses the educational philosophy of Muhammadiyah which has not been widely practiced. In particular, there are only two main works written by the Higher Education Research and Development Council Team of the Muhammadiyah Central Executive (Mulkhan and Abrar 2019). The first book is the only scientific book that specifically collects evidence of the philosophical foundations of Islamic education in Muhammadiyah which are based on Muhammadiyah's important documents. The book shows the philosophical basis of Muhammadiyah education which emphasizes rationality, science, and divinity. Meanwhile, the second book explains the ethical and philosophical basis of Muhammadiyah education. Through this book, the Muhammadiyah Higher Education Council team succeeded in exploring the philosophical values of Islamic

education in Muhammadiyah by presenting various academic arguments based on the philosophical thoughts of medieval Muslim philosophers.

Other works that are also relevant to this research are Mu'ti and Khoirudin's books (Mu'ti and Khoirudin 2019). This book also bases its study on a number of important documents which form the basis of Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy for studying religious plurality and the importance of multicultural Islamic education in Indonesia. According to Mu'ti and Khoirudin, Muhammadiyah is a socio-religious organization that plays an important role in accommodating religious diversity through education. In essence, the book focuses on the implementation of a pluralist Muhammadiyah education.

Mu'ti and Khoirudin's work is considered the closest to this research topic because it makes Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy the basis for multicultural educational values as actualized in various Muhammadiyah educational institutions. However, none of these writers specifically contextualize it in the development of an attitude of religious moderation, especially in dealing with religious extremism movements and thoughts which are problematic challenges for contemporary Muslims.

Ideally, the study of Muhammadiyah educational philosophy (Islam) contains three important aspects which include the foundations of epistemology, ontology and axiology. The basis of epistemology discusses the sources or foundations of knowledge, which in this case is simplified into a question of where the educational philosophy of Muhammadiyah is formulated. Then, on the basis of ontology, this research seeks to explore the nature, objectives, processes, curriculum, management, leadership and all matters relating to Islamic education (Muhammadiyah). In the aspect of ontology, it is also discussed about human nature as a creature of Allah SWT, which naturally is the subject as well as the object of education. While the axiological basis of the philosophy of Islamic education contains the values or benefits of Islamic education. So basically the educational philosophy of Muhammadiyah examines all questions that have relevance to the education that applies in Muhammadiyah. However, this article will only contain the contextualization of Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy and its contextualization of the development of an attitude of Islamic moderation against the threat of religious extremism.

Muhammadiyah has the characteristics of a movement as a socio-religious organization that is oriented towards Progressive Islam. The Progressive Islamic variant is in accordance with the meaning of Islam itself which means rising or progressing. Thus, Progressive Islam according to Muhammadiyah is various efforts to "raise degrees and advance human life, and fight backwardness, poverty, ignorance, and moral decline" (Mughni *et al.* 2022).

One of the forms of implementing the idea of Progressive Islam voiced by Muhammadiyah in the last decade is regarding the urgency of developing an attitude of Islamic moderation. An understanding of the concept and practice of Islamic moderation is very important, especially when society is facing global challenges related to acts of religious extremism (Muthohirin 2015; Wahyudi and Pradhan 2021). Islamic moderation is rooted in the verses of the Koran which mention the existence of *ummatan wasathan* which means the best of the people (al-Baqarah: 143), and the best role model for the people is Muhammad (al-Imran: 100).

Yusuf Qaradawi, a well-known Islamic scholar and activist with moderate Islamic thoughts, explained that Islamic moderation is a balance between sharia principles and the social and cultural conditions of society. He stressed that Islamic teachings must be applied in a way that is appropriate to the times and social context, and not in a dogmatic and inflexible way. Qardahawi also emphasized that Islamic moderation must be applied in all aspects of life, including politics, economics and social (Qaradhwani 2008, 2009). In interpreting the word "jihad", according to him, it does not always mean war. Jihad can also be interpreted as a struggle to uphold truth and justice. In certain situations, peace can be considered as a form of jihad. In carrying out Islamic teachings, attention must be paid to the context and social situation of today's society. In his book "Fiqh al-Jihad", he explains that social change and scientific developments must be recognized and taken into account in

interpreting Islamic teachings (Qaradawi, tt). Overall, Qaradawi's moderate Islamic view emphasizes the importance of a balanced and comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings, as well as the need for adaptation to changing times and social contexts.

Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah believes that Islamic moderation is the best people and not exaggerating in religion (*ghuluw*). In the life of modern society, Islam Wasathiyah must be contextual with democracy, human rights, and modernism. According to Haedar Nashir, Islam Wasathiyah means choosing a position in the middle of various extremities by upholding the concept of Islamic justice (Nashir 2020). Muhammadiyah understands that Islamic moderation consists of three dimensions, namely doing good (*khair*), not being extreme and not exaggerating, behaving in accordance with applicable science and law, and being fair (Mu'ti 2021).

Moderate as one of Muhammadiyah's eight main values has equivalent words in Arabic, namely *tawasuth*, *i'tidal*, *tawazun* and *iqtisad* which mean in harmony with the concept of justice. Haedar Nashir said that moderate means the opposite of *tatarruf* or *ghuluw* which means towards the periphery, extreme, radical and excessive. Moderate also means the best choice (Nashir 2021). In the *Second Century Statement of Muhammadiyah Thoughts* (Pernyataan Pikiran Muhammadiyah Abad Kedua) it is stated that Muhammadiyah is committed to developing progressive Islamic views and missions as this organization has striven for since its establishment in 1912. As a consequence, Muhammadiyah always pays attention to humanitarian issues at the national and global levels, including the threat of terrorism (PP Muhammadiyah 2010).

In the religious context, Islamic moderation means that Muslims must live in balance. Not excessive and not lacking in carrying out religious orders. Muslims must also find the right balance between faith and good deeds, between worshiping Allah and providing for the needs of the world, and between respecting the rights of others and fighting for personal rights. In addition, Islamic moderation also emphasizes the importance of equality and justice in everyday life. In essence, the main principle of Islamic moderation is to treat all people fairly regardless of their religious, cultural, linguistic or ethnic background. A Muslim must fight for the rights of others, especially the rights of the weak, such as children, women and the elderly.

Islamic moderation is a very important concept in Islam because it shows that this religion not only teaches not to be extreme in everyday life, but rather guides its followers towards a balanced and simple life. In other words, Islamic moderation teaches that Muslims must maintain balance in all aspects of life, both in religious, social and economic matters. In addition, Islamic moderation also teaches that every Muslim must understand and respect the differences that exist in society. Peaceful community life is an entity that consists of various backgrounds, beliefs, and outlooks on life. Therefore, Islamic moderation teaches not only to fight for personal or certain group interests, but also to fight for the interests of society as a whole. However, although the concept of Islamic moderation is very valuable for Muslims, there are several challenges that must be faced in applying this concept, such as facing pressure from groups that teach religious extremism.

Indonesia is in fifth position as a country in Southeast Asia that is most affected by various acts of terrorism (Liang *et al.* 2022). Suicide bombings at three churches in Surabaya (2018) were called the worst terrorist attacks in the last decade. The act of extremism in the name of religion was carried out by a family who recently returned from Syria, is affiliated with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), and is involved in the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah (JAD) and Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (JAT) networks (Yuliawati 2018). The suicide bombing also destroyed the cathedral church in Makassar (2021). In addition to successfully transforming its attack strategy through technological sophistication, suicide bombing and lone wolf work (Muthohirin 2021), terrorist groups also recruit and radicalize young minds with extremist understandings through social media (Muthohirin 2015; Bamualim *et al.* 2018; Huda *et al.* 2021).

After 9/11, Islamic extremism has become one of the serious problems faced by the world community in contemporary times (PEW 2021). Extremism is defined as an ideological belief that wants to place religious doctrines into the political system through violent means (Arena and Arrigo 2005). Extremism is also often interpreted as a terrorist movement against the state, such as ISIS in Syria and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines. The emergence of various acts of religious extremism is driven by a number of factors, including responses to injustice, oppression, and even misinterpretation of religious doctrines (Tibi 1998; Wibisono *et al.* 2019). The Institute of Economic and Peace in its latest research report entitled *Global Terrorism Index 2022*, notes that terrorism attacks at the world level increased by 5,226 attacks in 2021. Although the resulting death rate decreased to 7,142 people (down 1.1% from the previous year), Extremist groups continue to use advanced technology to carry out precision attacks, including using drones, GPS systems in mobile phones, and encrypted messaging services (Liang *et al.* 2022).

The ideology of Muhammadiyah is very far from these extreme religious-based movements. Muhammadiyah does not teach and does not condone acts of violence, intolerance, ideology of terrorism and disbelief. If a particular case mentions that a terrorist has attended a Muhammadiyah educational institution (Jateng.inews.id 2018), it cannot be the basis for calling Muhammadiyah an organization that teaches the doctrine of terrorism/Wahabism. The minor view that Muhammadiyah contains the doctrine of radicalism for the reason of adopting religious purification is nothing but a misguided thought because it ignores aspects of renewal (*tajdid*) and the rationality of thought which has been the ideology of Muhammadiyah (Boy ZTF 2016; Bachtiar 2020).

In terms of movement ideology, Muhammadiyah and Wahhabism are similar but not the same (Luth 2013). Both of them refer to the al-Qur'an and al-Hadith, but in the practice of purification of religion, both have different attitudes. Muhammadiyah and Wahhabism use different Islamic propagation methods due to differences in local culture. Arab Muslims are synonymous with tribal fanaticism (tribalism), while in Indonesia they are accommodative to local traditions. Muhammadiyah founder Kiai Ahmad Dahlan never banned cultural activities. In fact, he is very accepting of local Javanese traditions and culture. Ahmad Najib Burhani disclosed several things that indicated Muhammadiyah was open to local culture and traditions. According to him, in the early periods of Muhammadiyah's establishment, Friday sermons at Muhammadiyah mosques were carried out in Javanese. At every major event Muhammadiyah leaders always wore Javanese priyayi batik at that era (Burhani 2016).

In facing ideological infiltration and religious extremism movements, Muhammadiyah continues to move to encourage people to put forward a moderate attitude. This moderate attitude can be fostered through the implementation of Muhammadiyah Islamic educational philosophy which has been practiced so far in various Muhammadiyah schools or colleges. Some of Muhammadiyah's Islamic educational philosophies include: *First*, Muhammadiyah follows a comprehensive education model, which means teaching religious education, academic education, skills education, character education, and general education to students; *Second*, Muhammadiyah schools are always oriented towards building the character of students. Muhammadiyah considers that education is an effective tool in shaping one's character, so that graduates of Muhammadiyah schools are expected to have good character and noble character; *Third*, Islamic educational institutions in Muhammadiyah strive to form independent individuals who can think critically and make their own decisions and can contribute positively to society; *Fourth*, Muhammadiyah's philosophy of Islamic education always prioritizes rationality, inclusiveness and knowledge. Muhammadiyah considers that science-based education is the basis for understanding and practicing Islamic teachings, so Muhammadiyah schools provide quality and science-oriented education.

4 CONCLUSION

Overall, Islamic moderation is a very important concept in Islam because it teaches its followers to be fair, equal and balanced in all aspects of life. By practicing Islamic moderation, Muslims will become a balanced and civilized society. Every individual Muslim will become a community that respects the rights of others and fights for their own rights. By applying the principles of Islamic moderation, it is hoped that it can become a pioneer for the realization of a society that is *baldatun tayyibatun wa rabbun ghafur*. However, this moderate attitude will not grow if it is not taught through a well-organized educational model.

In this case, the good practice of Muhammadiyah Islamic education can be a medium for the dissemination of understanding of the principles of Islamic moderation. Apart from the number of Muhammadiyah educational institutions which number in the thousands from early childhood to university levels, it is also because of Muhammadiyah's Islamic educational philosophy which contains moderate Islamic doctrines. Since initiating the establishment of Muhammadiyah schools, Kiai Dahlan has wanted Muhammadiyah educational institutions to be managed inclusively, both in terms of thought (integrating religious knowledge with general knowledge) and movement (in collaboration with other religious groups).

Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy focuses on holistic individual development, which includes intellectual, spiritual, social, and physical aspects. Muhammadiyah education also emphasizes the development of noble character and morals adhered to by Islam as the basis for forming people who believe and fear Allah SWT. In addition, Muhammadiyah's philosophy of Islamic education emphasizes the formation of individuals who are independent and creative, and able to adapt to the times and technology. This education also focuses on scientific aspects such as science, technology, arts, and sports.

Muhammadiyah Islamic Education also pays attention to the formation of people who love the motherland and are virtuous, and are able to contribute to the development of society and the state. Muhammadiyah's educational philosophy basically seeks to produce human beings who are prosperous, have strong personalities, and are beneficial to their environment.

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