

# Islamic moderation in elementary school: strengthening the Aswaja Annadhliyah curriculum in preventing religious radicalism

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## ABSTRACT

This action research aims to improve teachers' ability to enrich, redesign, develop, and test the *ahlusunah waljamaah* (Aswaja) Annadhliyah curriculum in strengthening Islamic moderation in 25 *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (Islamic elementary schools) in Kedu Caresidenan, Central Java, Indonesia. The method used was participatory action research modeled by Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon, an experimental type of action research. The research findings state that Islamic moderation through strengthening the Aswaja Annadhliyah curriculum is carried out by enriching and redesigning the curriculum in the aspects of objectives, content/materials, methods/activities, and assessment/evaluation. The form of strengthening the Aswaja Annadhliyah curriculum is carried out by developing a curriculum by providing material on the basic principles of Aswaja, Ukhuwah Nahdliyah, and Mabadi Khaira Ummah in the aspects of *fikrah* (thought), *aqidah* (belief), *harakah* (movement), and *amaliyah* (worship practices). As a result, teachers know the depth and breadth of the curriculum in terms of objectives, content, methods, and evaluation at the level of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*, determining basic competencies, operational verbs, materials, material enrichment, and selecting appropriate learning models, methods, strategies, and media. Future research needs to explore curriculum strengthening for Aswaja Annadhliyah at the high school or university level.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In responding to the onslaught of radicalism and liberalism, the *ahlusunah waljamaah* (Aswaja) Annadhliyah curriculum in *madrasah ibtidaiyah* (Islamic elementary schools) of the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java is urgently strengthened [1]–[3]. This is because the Aswaja Annadhliyah curriculum has a mission of mercy for all nature and is in line with religious moderation (Islam), Pancasila, strengthening the Pancasila student profile (P5), and the profile of students *rahmatan lil*

*alamin* (PPRA) in Islamic education in Indonesia [4]–[6]. The onslaught of radicalism has entered education with indicators of games containing radical content, jihadist pedagogy, Islamic education materials containing invitations to war jihad, books containing arguments to invite war, ultra-conservation paradigms in Islamic schools, and others [7]–[10]. In this context, education must be present to prevent radicalism by strengthening the curriculum with Islamic moderation. In the era of globalization, Islamic moderation has become a major concern for parents, educators, scholars, and leaders as a solution to radicalism in the name of religion [11]. Islamic moderation is not just a personal issue but relates to religious issues in thought and practice [12], [13]. So far, Islam has become a “scapegoat” because the majority of radicals hide in the mask of Islam, even though Islam is a moderate and tolerant religion. In essence, radicalism and terrorism are not the substance of Islam but only carried out by a group of people related to hardline Islamic groups [14], [15]. They are fundamentalist Islamic groups that eradicate anything they consider un-Islamic. The pattern of the movement is divided into three: reformative (purification of Islamic teachings from the influence of elements outside Islam), awareness to get out of the isolation of other forces outside Islam, and the growth of belief to solve human problems [16], [17]. This pattern is applied to education with various patterns and camouflages that develop [18].

The Jakarta Institute for Islam and peace studies found that 48.9% of students agreed with radicalism [19], PPIM UIN Jakarta’s research said 34.3% of student and teacher respondents had an opinion of intolerance towards followers of religions outside Islam. Maarif Institute research explained the infiltration of radicalism values in schools through three doors, namely alums, teachers, and school policies [20]. The coordination forum for the prevention of terrorism (FKPT) of Central Java as one of 12 red zone areas for the spread of radicalism and terrorism. In several cases of terrorism, both the perpetrators/victims are from Central Java, and many organizations embrace radicalism. In the former Kedu Regency (Temanggung Regency, Magelang Regency, Magelang City, Purworejo Regency, Kebumen Regency, Wonosobo Regency), the embryo of radicalism has been detected [21]. Similarly, in other areas, especially in urban areas, there are indications of the spread of radicalism in educational institutions. In terms of age, children, and adolescents are vulnerable to being indoctrinated with the ideology of radicalism because they are searching for identity and the meaning of life. Naturally, schools and campuses become incubators of radicalization in disguise [22]. All teachers, curricula, and learning materials must be strong to stem radicalism [23].

Research in the last decade has explored the role of education in preventing radicalism, such as building an Islamic education curriculum with religious moderation in Islamic higher education [24], internalizing religious nationalist characters through Hujjah Aswaja in preventing radical ideology in Germany and Indonesia [25], implementing religious moderation in *madrasah tsanawiyah* (Islamic junior high school) through Aswaja subjects [26], deradicalization through Aswaja courses in Islamic universities [27], the work of Educational Institution Ma’arif Nahdlatul Ulama in developing Islamic education [28], a comparison of Educational Institution Ma’arif Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah educational institutions in teaching Islamic moderation [29], and the development of a religious moderation curriculum on Indonesian campuses [30]. There still needs to be more research that examines Islamic moderation through strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum at the Educational Institution Ma’arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java, so the research to be carried out is very different from previous research.

Islamic moderation is a paradigm (way of seeing) with the *wasatiyyah* (middle way), not extreme right (radical), and extreme left (liberal) [31]–[33]. Islamic moderation from the Nahdlatul Ulama perspective has a different style from Western moderation. The building of Islamic moderation from a Western perspective and the mainstream of its moderation leads to the secularization and liberalization of Islam and contradiction with the spirit of Islam [34]. Islamic moderation from the Nahdlatul Ulama perspective mainstreams the character of nationalism and religiosity; its characteristics are *at-tawashut* (middle/moderate attitude), *at-tawazun* (balanced), *at-tasamuh* (tolerance), *at-ta’adul* (upright), and *amar ma’ruf nahi munkar* (calling for good deeds and forbidding evil) [35]. These attitudes are the principles of the middle way, which in the Quran is called *ummatah wasathan* (the middle people) [36]. Such a form of people is described in the Quran as *khaira ummah* (the best of society) [37]. These characters in NU are manifested in aspects of *fikrah* (thought), *aqidah* (belief), *harakah* (movement), and *amaliyah* (worship practices). The Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum implemented in Ma’arif elementary schools in Central Java is still not optimal in building moderate characters. Based on initial studies, the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum used by elementary schools has yet to be organized according to the principles expected by Nahdlatul Ulama; the material is repeated and needs to be structured according to the five curriculum components.

Based on the background, the researcher wants to research Islamic moderation by strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum of the Educational Institution Ma’arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java to prevent religious radicalism in Ma’arif elementary schools in three districts. To answer this, the researcher asked three research questions: i) how is Islamic moderation through strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum at the Educational Institution Ma’arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java? ii) what is the form of

strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum, and iii) what is the impact of strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum for teachers and students?

## 2. METHOD

This participatory action research was designed using the Stephen Kemmis, Robin McTaggart, and Rhonda Nixon model, which consists of planning, action, observation, and reflection [38]. The type of action is experimental action research. The research was carried out with an effort to apply direct involvement techniques effectively and efficiently through activities so that teachers of the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java can redesign the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum to prevent religious radicalism [39]. Data collection techniques in this research are through focus group discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, structured observations, and document studies obtained from 25 Ma'arif elementary schools in Kedu Karesidenan (Temanggung Regency, Magelang Regency, and Purworejo Regency).

In planning, researchers planned actions to carry out FGDs/workshops on the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum. In the action stage, the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum workshop was held with a resource person, namely the coordinator of the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum Team of the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java involving 25 teachers in three districts. Observations were carried out during the workshop process and curriculum preparation. Implementation was carried out twice, face-to-face and online. Reflection was conducted at the end of each activity and in the final series of research activities. In-depth interviews were conducted with the chairperson, curriculum development coordinator, and teachers to explore the depth and breadth of the curriculum, curriculum structure, and evaluation. Structured observations were conducted in elementary schools to observe the learning process of NU subjects, using the document study technique to review Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum documents, books, and evaluation instruments. Data presentation techniques are carried out with qualitative techniques through systematic, accurate, and factual descriptions of Islamic moderation, forms of reinforcement, and impacts on elementary schools of the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the actions in this research went through four stages. First is the planning stage. At this stage, the researcher and the subject conducted joint problem-solving and determined the appropriate solution. The jointly agreed follow-up is a socialization, training, and dissemination program of curriculum books. Based on problem mapping in Temanggung Regency, Magelang Regency and Purworejo Regency, the Aswaja Annahdliyah (NU) curriculum produced by the Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Education Institute of Central Java used by elementary schools has not had a significant impact on changes in moderate character in students due to several factors, namely: i) incompatibility of core competencies and basic competencies of NU subjects for grades 4-6, ii) the core competencies and basic competencies of NU-II subjects are still dominated by Islamic Religious Education (*Akidah* (Moral), *Akhlak* (theology), History of Islamic Culture, Jurisprudence, Quran Hadith), iii) the content/character of Aswaja Annahdliyah is still weak, iv) there is no mapping of material on the aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah* aspects of Aswaja Annahdliyah, v) the material at each level is not competent and there is repetition of material, vi) NU subjects are limited to being local content, and (vii) teachers teaching these subjects are not competent and do not receive training.

Second is the action stage. Researchers assisted elementary schools with several steps. The first FGD was to enrich, redesign, develop, and test the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum to strengthen Islamic moderation. Elementary school teachers and resource persons, namely the curriculum drafting team and NU books, were present in this activity. This activity found that the understanding of moderate Islamic teachings has not been maximized because the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum still needs to be structured. This is because there is a mismatch between the core competencies and basic competencies of NU subjects from grades 4-6. The activity was filled with questions and answers and assignments. The assignments given to participants were analyzing the discrepancies in the core competencies and basic competencies of NU subjects from grades 4-6, analyzing Islamic values or Islamic moderation in the curriculum by referring to the dimensions of attitude, knowledge, and skills as well as the scope of the orientation of elementary school education (*amaliyah*, habituation, and symbolization). In this stage, curriculum technical guidance was conducted. In this process, the research team assisted teachers in technically analyzing the suitability of core and basic competencies. Furthermore, they analyzed the content of Islamic moderation in the curriculum. Each participant was then grouped into three groups. Participants were given curriculum books to be reviewed together. The second FGD was conducted after the participants finished analyzing the curriculum. In the meeting, participants presented the results of analyzing the incompatibility of core and basic

competencies of NU subjects from grades 4-6 of elementary school. The resource person evaluated the results of the curriculum analysis.

Third is the observation stage. The researcher observed the participation of the research subjects with the observation indicators that had been formulated. The instrument is that participants are enthusiastic, active, and responsive in curriculum assistance activities. Participants actively took notes, asked questions, and answered during curriculum development assistance activities. Participants are active and responsive in working together on tasks guided by the resource person. Participants actively disseminate the results of the curriculum analysis. Furthermore, the team analyzed and calculated the impact of implementing the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum produced by the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java on elementary school subjects to strengthen Islamic moderation. The results of the analysis of participants' participation are then used as a reference for follow-up in the next activity.

Fourth is the reflection stage. The researcher, together with the subject, evaluates the results of the activity on an ongoing basis. Reflection is carried out in each activity stage: the research team and the subject were evaluated after the activity stage was completed. The research team and the subject followed up on the evaluation results to find shortcomings, strengths, and solutions to activity obstacles. The research team and the subject agree on implementing activities that will be carried out in the future according to the timeline. Reflection is carried out by analyzing all activities and the impact of strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum, which can be used to build Islamic moderation on the subject. Reflection is intended for further research recommendations. Evaluation is done by compiling research results into products through redesigned curricula, reports, journals, and books.

### 3.1. Islamic moderation through strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum

Islamic moderation carried out by the Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama Education Institute of Central Java through strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum refers to five curriculum components. First, in the aspect of purpose, all core and basic competencies are directed to three aspects that characteristically strengthen the values of religious moderation, and are mapped at the level of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. At the elementary school level, the emphasis is more on the aspects of *amaliyah* and acculturation of Islamic traditions, at the junior high school level it is at the level of *fikrah* (philosophical thinking, showing arguments from the Al-Quran and Assunnah). At the senior high school level at the *harakah* level (actively engaged through IPNU-IPPNU organizations, Pagar Nusa, to broadcast moderate Islam). Second, in the aspect of curriculum content/materials, strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum to strengthen Islamic moderation is carried out by including all elements of Islamic material in the aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. Strengthening the content and material of the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum is also carried out by including the basic principles of Aswaja, namely *at-tawashut*, *at-tawazun*, *at-tasamuh*, *at-ta'adul*, and *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*. In addition, it is strengthened by *ukhuwah nahdliyah*, which consists of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (brotherhood with Muslims), *ukhuwah basyariyah / insaniyah* (brotherhood among humans), and *ukhuwah wathaniyah* (brotherhood among nations). The curriculum is strengthened by the values of Mabadi Khaira Ummah (the formation of the best people), namely *ash-shidqu* (honesty or truth and sincerity), *al-amanah wal wafa bil'ahdi* (able to carry out all tasks, especially those that have been promised), *al'adalah* (being objective, proportional and obedient to principles), *at-ta'awun* (helpful character and cooperation), and finally *istiqamah* (consistent character, and not easily shaken). Third, methods/activities in curriculum implementation using problem-based learning (PBL), discovery/inquiry learning, and production-based education (PBE), models, strategies, and other learning methods that are contextual, active learning, and cooperative. The specialty of the method in learning NU subjects is the method of familiarization with Islamic traditions such as reading maulid dziba (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad), *Aqoid 50*, grave pilgrimage, *istigotsah*, *manaqib*, *selawat*, *asmaul husna* (99 names of Allah), and others. Meanwhile, another method is to sharpen the understanding of the arguments from the Al-Quran and Assunnah so that students can fortify the deviant radical Islamic teachings. The application of this method cannot be separated from the scope of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. Fourth, the assessment in the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum. The curriculum development team, the internal quality assurance team, and the curriculum development team carry out evaluations at the provincial and district/city levels. Independently at the elementary school level, the principal and deputy head of curriculum periodically assess and evaluate the implemented Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum. At the technical level, teachers conduct learning evaluations referring to cognitive, affective, psychomotoric assessments on aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*.

The Islamic moderation carried out by the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java is novel because it offers a more moderate curriculum regarding content, methods, and assessment. This is certainly different from previous research, which stated that to strengthen a designed or redesigned curriculum, it must improve the aspects of objectives, content/material, methods/activities, and evaluation/assessment [40]–[43]. In this context, the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of

Central Java has strengthened the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum, which is in line with the concept of Islamic moderation, which contains non-violent, tolerant, and accommodating values towards local culture.

### 3.2. Forms of strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum

The strengthening of the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum is carried out in four aspects: objectives, material/content, methods/activities, and assessment/evaluation. In this technical research, teachers have the skills and mastery in analyzing the curriculum and redesigning the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum in *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. The description of these achievements can be seen from the following indicators. First, teachers analyze the incompatibility of core competencies (KI) and basic competencies (KD) of NU subjects from grades IV-VI. The material has then been analyzed by teachers in groups based on the orientation of operational verbs (KKO) according to Anderson's revised edition of Bloom's taxonomy and the scope of the elementary curriculum orientation (*amaliyah*, habituation, and symbolization), namely the level of remembering (C1), understanding (C2), applying (C3), analyzing (C4), evaluating (C5), and creating (C6). Second, teachers can map and analyze the core competencies and basic competencies of NU subjects so that they are not dominated by Islamic Religious Education subjects (*Akidah Akhlak*, Islamic Cultural History, Jurisprudence, Quran Hadith). Third, teachers include Aswaja Annahdliyah character content. Fourth, teachers can map the material content on aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah* according to the level of education. Fifth, teachers simplify the material at each level so that there is no repetition of material.

Of the five indicators, in essence the form of strengthening is mapped on four aspects of the curriculum which is strengthened by the basic principles of Aswaja, ukhuwah nahdliyah, and Mabadi Khaira Ummah with mapping on aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. Teachers teaching NU subjects can independently redesign the curriculum with various needs according to objectives, content/materials, methods, and assessments in *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. This is certainly in line with research findings that curriculum innovation is more appropriately implemented by the teacher himself, who knows the depth and breadth of the material, as well as the needs of students in learning [44]–[46]. This confirms that students need the curriculum teachers have prepared because it departs from social facts, aside from being sourced from a philosophical, juridical, and theoretical foundation. The Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum prepared by the teachers in this research was born according to the needs and answers the social conditions that require a moderate curriculum with Islamic *wasatiyah* principles.

### 3.3. The impact of strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum on teachers and students

After teachers received action on strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum, they were eager to carry out transformative action. The fundamental thing is that teachers' views on the curriculum and their role and participation in strengthening the curriculum become integral to preventing radicalism in the name of religion in elementary schools. This program will certainly help reduce radicalism in elementary schools. This aligns with efforts to prevent radicalism, which can be done with an action approach. The research subjects are subjects and not objects of activity/action. This is done so that this research activity is truly sustainable, not just introducing and providing training on functions and ways of implementing the curriculum but also sustainable action and empowerment that prioritizes the role of partners as the main actors in this activity. Indicators of research subjects as the main actors in this activity are the involvement of action research subjects in this activity from upstream to downstream both in planning, implementation, evaluation, and determining strategies in ensuring the sustainability of the implementation of the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum. Based on observations of teachers about strengthening this curriculum, awareness and transformative efforts of teachers to strengthen the curriculum in schools/madrasas are fundamental needs for the learning system. This is further strengthened by the results of observations of teacher involvement with indicators of participants' enthusiasm for participating in curriculum assistance activities. Participants actively ask and answer questions during curriculum assistance activities. Participants actively cooperate in working on tasks given by the research team. Participants actively disseminate the results of curriculum analysis. The percentage of participant participation in curriculum strengthening is 84% in the very good category and 16% in the good category.

After being given action, teachers can apply several aspects. First, knowing the depth and breadth of the curriculum in terms of objectives, content, methods, and evaluation at the level of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. Second, teachers determine basic competencies and operational verbs, determine material, enrich material, and select appropriate learning models, methods, strategies, and media. Third, teachers independently implement this curriculum by developing it according to their needs and changing times. Although future curriculum changes are certain, the material content in *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah* can still be applied to the 2013 Curriculum, Merdeka Curriculum, or others. This is in line with research that says that to make the curriculum successful, an educator must conduct content analysis,

criticize, innovate, and diffuse the curriculum so that it is contextualized and adapted to the times [47], [48]. On the learner side, it focuses more on the ability to apply and accept Islamic teachings that are integrated into culture, students can also think philosophically, using scientific arguments referring to arguments from the Al-Quran and Assunnah according to the level of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. In the long term, the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum developed by the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java is adopted by Ma'arif elementary schools in Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Lampung, and Yogyakarta Special Region.

#### 4. CONCLUSION




Islamic moderation through strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum is carried out by redesigning the curriculum in four aspects: objectives, content/material, methods/activities, and assessment/evaluation. The form of strengthening the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum is carried out by redesigning and strengthening the curriculum by providing material on the basic principles of Aswaja, Ukhuwah Nahdliyah, and Mabadi Khaira Ummah in the aspects of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*. The impact that occurs is that teachers know the depth and breadth of the curriculum in terms of objectives, content, methods, and evaluation at the level of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah*, and *amaliyah*, teachers can determine basic competencies, operational verbs, determine the material, enrichment of material, and selection of appropriate models, methods, strategies, and learning media. Teachers independently implement this curriculum by developing it according to their needs and changing times. Students focus more on the ability to apply and accept Islamic teachings which are integrated into culture, they think philosophically, use scientific arguments referring to the postulates from the Quran and Assunnah according to the levels of *fikrah*, *aqidah*, *harakah* and *amaliyah*. The Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum developed by the Educational Institution Ma'arif Nahdlatul Ulama of Central Java was adopted by Ma'arif schools in Papua, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Lampung and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. This research is limited to the elementary school level in three districts. Future research needs to examine the Aswaja Annahdliyah curriculum to strengthen Islamic moderation.

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